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STATESMAN

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the modern intellectual

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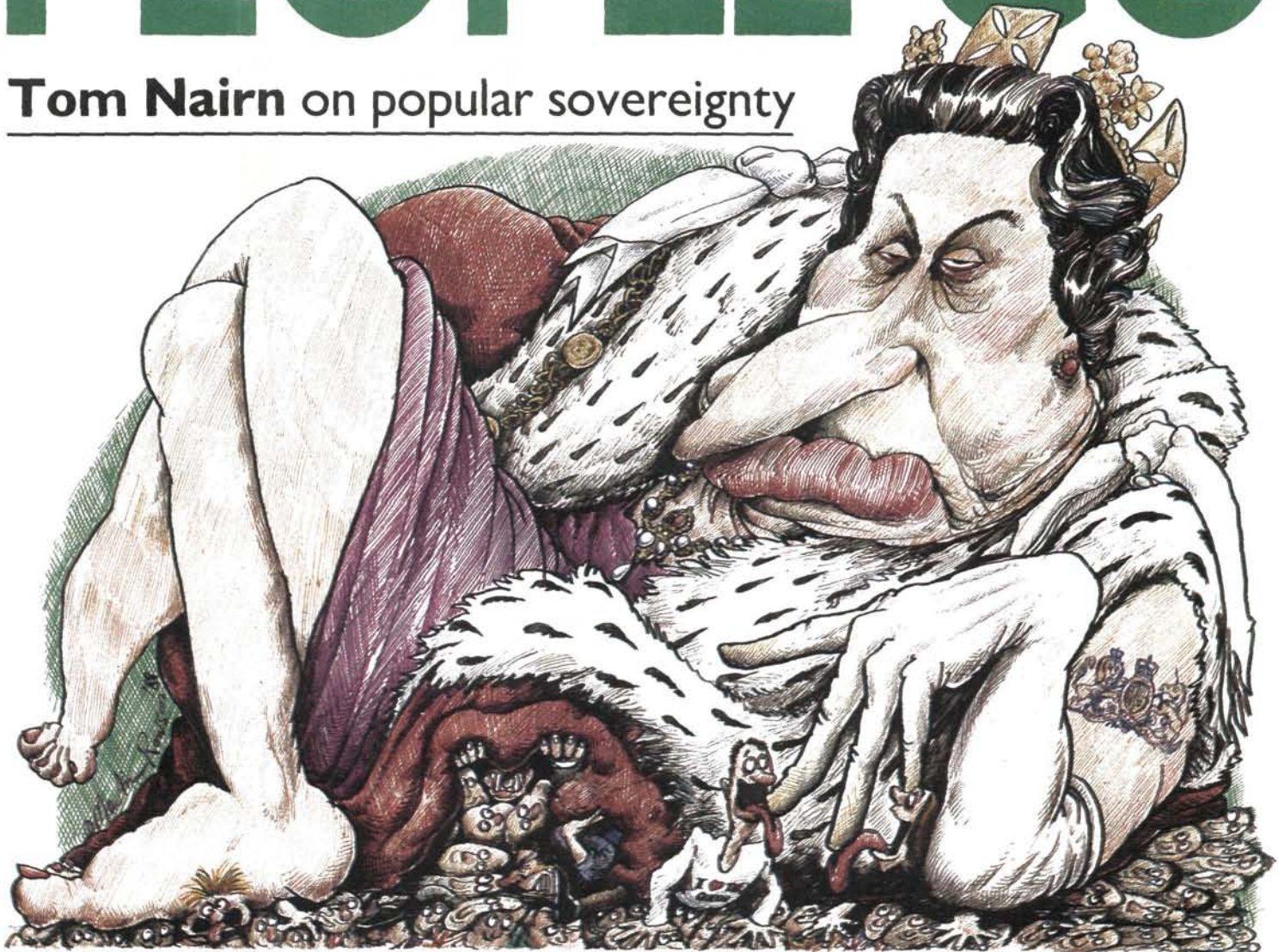
Blagden, Garry

Tax and
the stinking
rich

MAY 16 1988

LET OUR PEOPLE GO

Tom Nairn on popular sovereignty



Cover illustration: Martin Rowson

ANTI-APARTHEID MOVEMENT

"If the international community does not apply effective sanctions, there will be an almighty explosion in this country. I hope the people in Britain will do what the people in America did and overturn the policies of their Government."

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, 29th Feb 1988

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NEXT WEEK



Barbara Ehrenreich on the politics of Jesse Jackson; Helen Birch on Myra Hindley; Jonathan Mirsky on Chinese liberalism

The grapes of Reith

LICENCE-PAYERS are our shareholders, announced the BBC's Director General, Michael Checkland, during the corporation's recent glossy self-promotion exercise. The BBC, he implied, is responsible, accountable and well-managed. It is the very model of a modern private enterprise.

The theme shifted from hype to self-abasement when the chairman, Duke Hussey, addressed the Institute of Directors a short while later. We have sinned, he said (or rather, the journalists have sinned) but we will do better. The licence payers are our *customers*.

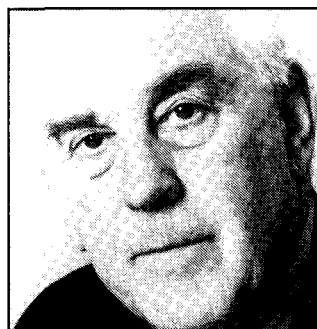
Shareholders are not customers, and neither word is a useful metaphor for the relationship between the corporation and the viewing public. We can't vote Hussey or Checkland off their boards, and so long as we own a television, we can't avoid giving them our money.

Hussey seems confused. He implied that the BBC was in danger of becoming "out of line with public taste", yet later warned against "the temptation to go for the mass end of the market". "The BBC is determined to fly the flag of quality," he said, and was able to do so because "the security of our income means that we can serve minorities, we can take risks, we can nurture talent." Yet at the same time, "We are increasingly commercially minded . . . Auntie is now loosening her corsets and wading firmly into the marketplace."

Even on the licence fee, it was unclear just where he stood. "[It] is now linked to the retail price index. I have no objection to this. It seems a reasonable discipline. But because broadcasting costs rise faster than inflation, we suffer a cut in our real income, while that of our competitors is growing." If the BBC's real income is steadily falling, then Hussey should object.

Hussey's preferred regime, it seems, would be one of free-market Reithianism. Even if such an apparently self-contradictory notion could be sustained, it is an unappetising one for the left. We all know what the free market means for the mass media: look at Fleet Street. Equally, old-fashioned Reithianism is an idea whose time has gone. Whatever its virtues, it is inherently undemocratic and must be partly responsible for the current flabby state of the BBC.

Events of the last few years have also shown the BBC to be extraordinarily vulnerable to Thatcherism's predatory powers. Hussey's entrepreneurial model offers no reassurance on that point; indeed, he seemed to imply that he, too, could be subject to political pressure — not, he said, that he would succumb. All the same, a system where the government appoints



the governors who appoint the managers who appoint the journalists is visibly leading to self-censorship.

But the old system of aloof, apolitical governors was not self-evidently better. It led to the BBC, in the form of the board of management, policing itself, which meant complacency (which Hussey correctly identifies) and rule by a self-perpetuating elite. Paradoxically,

ITV, which has *always* suffered hands-on intervention from the IBA (whose members are also appointed by the government) has fared better. Recent BBC rows have only made plain what was inherently a problem: the governors *are* the BBC, and so it always risks becoming a state broadcasting organisation.

If "shareholder" and "customer" mentalities aren't the answer, what is? So far, only some of the parameters are clear. A method of funding could be instituted which normally links the money the BBC gets (from the government) with the amount that the ITV companies raise from advertising. Then there has to be a recognition that the BBC's current "autonomy" is a weakness rather than a strength: its lack of connection to the outside world allows it to be hijacked. The goal of moving towards a greater use of independent producers (the government would like 25 per cent) could go some way towards anchoring it down. In the longer term, a different kind of regulatory body, which is not the BBC, has to be found.

And it has to be accepted that the corporation as structured is not the only possible model of public service broadcasting. Clearly, Channel 4 is another one. The BBC could still, arguably, be in the business of public service broadcasting even if all it did was lease out the facilities to other programme-makers. Its roles as a producer of programmes and as a manager of broadcasting facilities do not *necessarily* go together: splitting them up could introduce greater democracy into the broadcasting process.

Neither does public service broadcasting necessarily have to be carried out by *one* institution. There could be a clutch of them: a separate radio corporation, community radio and the Open University broadcasting unit could all be constituted as free-standing units outside the marketplace. Meanwhile, the BBC remains under Thatcher's thumb. Which leaves the left, once again, in the paradoxical position of defending liberal bourgeois institutions and values — with no sign of the bourgeois liberals who ought to have joined them. If they're waiting, unseen, to charge over the hill, it's about time they began to fall in. □

DIARY

It has been a lively week at Wheen Acres. I wrote an article for *Radio Times* suggesting that there is a drink 'n' drugs problem at USAF bases in Britain and that some of the men in F1-11s are kindred spirits to the Yorkshire Ripper. (Indeed, even Peter Sutcliffe might raise an eyebrow at one or two of the ditties in the 77th Tactical Fighter Squadron's songbook, such as "I Fucked a Dead Whore".) An uncontentious enough point, I should have thought.

Apparently not. I was denounced in the *Sunday Telegraph*, the *Independent* (thank you, William Rees-Mogg) and, most gratifying of all, the leader column of the *Sun*. I had an outraged telephone call from the *Stars and Stripes*, the newspaper for American troops overseas. I had anonymous calls from my local USAF base. "I don't know how you can live with yourself," screamed one woman who called herself merely "an officer's wife". I was asked on to NBC News to explain myself. And the copper's nark, Sir Eldon Griffiths MP, made an official complaint about me to Duke Hussey, the BBC chairman. At times like this one almost begins to feel socially useful.

Since last week's *World in Action* on the decline of the BBC, John Birt's attitude to news and current affairs has been vigorously defended by Sir William Rees-Mogg and the former *NS* editor John Lloyd. Their line seems to be as follows. A programme such as *World in Action* is an advocate. It presents a case — for prosecution or defence, according to subject — rather than analysis. It omits any arguments that conflict with its own view. The kind of journalism that Birt represents is, by contrast, interested in the whole truth in all its glorious complexity.

What balderdash. There is one television current affairs programme which is notorious above all others for editing out any views that don't suit its "thesis". Its producers prefer neatness to complexity. As one of them put it, interviewees' remarks "are shaped to meet the demands of the script. This script will certainly have been written in advance of the interview and quite right too". Interviewees who decline to say what they're told to say are simply dropped.

This is *Weekend World*, the programme which John Birt founded. It is a memorial to his idea of good journalism.

As my mail always arrives a couple of weeks late, I have yet to receive an envelope stamped "Jesus Is Alive". But the Post Office tells me that it is now defacing more than 30 million letters in this way every day, even though PO guidelines insist that postmarks must not be "controversial or in any

way unacceptable to the public". What is to be done? Some suggestions:

1) Stamp your outgoing mail with the equally uncontroversial and acceptable message "Jesus is a Myth". A rubber stamp bearing these words can be had for £3 post paid from the Prompt Rubber Stamp Company, 29 Park View Gardens, London NW4 (tel: 01-202 8586).

2) If you receive a letter stamped "Jesus Is Alive", mark it "Unacceptable — Return to Sender" and drop it back in the post. Naturally this treatment is inadvisable for envelopes containing cheques or love letters.

3) Before sending a letter, black out the space to the left of the postage stamp with a felt pen. The same effect can be achieved by using black envelopes for the duration.

4) Write to the Post Office. I asked a spokesman this week whether, in view of all the fuss, the campaign would be stopped prematurely. To my surprise he said there had been few complaints.

5) If you have a few quid spare, bring a private prosecution against the Post Office. Under the 1953 Post Office Act it is an offence to send (or "attempt to send or procure to be sent") an envelope which has "any words, marks or designs which are grossly offensive". Make sure you call A.J. Ayer as a witness.

Not that I mind Christians believing that Christ is alive, of course, any more than I mind children believing in Father Christmas. I just think they've got a damned nerve announcing it as uncontested fact on my personal mail without my approval. If anyone's beliefs need protecting and respecting these days it isn't Christians but humanists. Only

ROGER WODDIS

It will all end in tears

David Hockney, who is reportedly threatening to call off his retrospective exhibition at the Tate Gallery in protest against the anti-homosexual Clause 29 of the Local Government Bill, has condemned a "meanness of spirit and smallness of imagination" in "Nanny England"

Little minds clump for a Government bill,
Dressed in convention and cavalry twill.
Hush! Hush! Glad he's not straight,
Hockney is thinking of snubbing the Tate.

God bless Nanny, who knows what's right.
Isn't it dark when she turns off the light?
I feel such a tingling up my spine.
Oh, God bless Nanny and Clause 29!

If you close your mind a little bit more
(But keep it open for lovely war),
It'll be as full as a garbage cart.
Oh, God bless Nanny and down with Art!

And thank you, Nanny, for making me blush
At freedom of spirit and Hockney's brush;
And bless you, Nanny, for making me see
How thick as a plank are the powers that be!

last week the Archbishop of Canterbury submitted a report to the Lord Chancellor demanding yet more discrimination against humanists. Specifically he wanted a new statutory offence of blasphemy which would protect "adherents of all religions" rather than merely Christians. Would Scientologists be protected, then? I turned for guidance to the Archbishop's spokeswoman, Eve Keatley (who, by the way, pronounces blasphemy with a delightful long "a" — "blarsphemy"). She admitted that, astonishingly, the report offers no definition of what it means by "religion". But she thought the problem would "rarely arise", and when it did the Director of Public Prosecutions could decide whether a belief was "a bona fide religion or a phoney religion". Aha! And what is a bona fide religion? "A mainstream religion." So you can still be rude about Ron Hubbard, probably, but anyone uttering a disrespectful word about Islam will have their hands chopped off. Needless to say, the Archbishop does not think humanists or rationalists are entitled to any protection at all from insults to their beliefs. "They would not wish it," Eve Keatley assures me.

"What is clearly true," wrote Paul Johnson (yes, the Paul Johnson) in last Saturday's *Wall Street Journal*, as he surveyed the British industrial scene, "is that highly-organised members of a far-left group known as Militant Tendency have been active on the shop-floor recently and have enjoyed some success. It is significant that Steve Riley, a Militant shop steward at Ford's largest plant in Dagenham, has just been elected to the National Executive of Britain's biggest union, the 1.4 million-strong Transport and General Workers." This was almost the only hard "fact" in an article that was otherwise long on generalities.

And of course it's not true. Not even "clearly true". Steve Riley is not a Militant shop steward: he isn't in the Militant Tendency.

Poor old Paul. Just as 24 monkeys with typewriters will sooner or later write *Hamlet*, so by the law of averages one would think that Ginger Johnson must eventually get something right. But it's a long wait.

On the train from Manchester to Oxford last Friday night, I asked the buffet steward for a sandwich. No chance. He had been issued with just a dozen on setting out on the train from Bournemouth that morning. His superiors apparently thought that 12 sandwiches would be ample for the following 17 hours.

During the wait at Birmingham I ran up to the station buffet. I grabbed a microwaved object in a cardboard box marked PIZZA. Back on the train, I chomped my way mindlessly through this food-stuff. Post-chomp, I discovered that junk food had deadened my palate more severely than I thought: as well as devouring the congealing mess of tomato, cheese and dough I had also eaten a large part of the cardboard box. And I never noticed a thing.

Francis Wheen

Sex and the poll tax

THANKS TO THE poll tax, "sex-snooping" could soon be back in the news. The spectacle of staff from the council treasurer's department quizzing neighbours and peering under beds for signs of men's shoes is not too far away and this time it won't just be claimants of state benefits on the receiving end.

The government has advised local authorities to use the Department of Health and Social Security's notorious cohabitation guidelines in order to assess whether a couple are liable for each other's poll tax. The concept of joint and several liability, enshrined in the poll tax proposals, means that if a couple, married or not, splits up and the man leaves, the woman will have to notify the poll tax registration officer as quickly as she can. Until she does she will be liable for his tax, including any arrears he might have run up while still living with her.

The tax will be a new and heavy burden for many women. Female earnings are about 75 per cent of male earnings and the tax is not based on ability to pay. Women outside paid employment, caring for children or dependent relatives, will also have to pay it (or at least 20 per cent of it).

Joint and several liability, not surprisingly, has been unable to encompass the concept of anything other than heterosexual cohabitation — a curious piece of positive discrimination from the "party of the family". But unwaged women who "cohabit" in the DHSS sense of the word will undoubtedly be forced into increased dependence on their partners. It is not hard to imagine hard-pressed couples wrangling about whether the woman should pay her poll tax bill out of the housekeeping money, especially in families where child benefit is the only money to which the woman has direct access.

Indeed, the tax is a recipe for family friction. This year's electoral rolls are significantly reduced; thousands of people are failing to register, in the hope of evading poll tax officers. Financially dependent women could easily be pressured to forgo their voting rights. Young, low-earning or unemployed adults or dependent elderly relatives could be similarly leaned on.

It is not only the electoral roll which poll tax officers will be using to hunt down reluctant taxpayers. Records of library users and school registers will also be scrutinised. "As a bounty hunter, I'm going to find myself in conflict with civil liberty," one finance officer, Gerry Brookman of Wakefield council, told a group of MPs last month. Brookman says that besides the voting registers, he will look at names on the register of births, marriages and deaths, Family Practitioner Committee records of people attending GPs and dentists and, if he can, at lists held by gas, electricity and phone companies.

The step from the poll tax to an identity card for everyone is small: Tory councillors in the Association of District Councils are arguing that no one should receive any state benefit unless they can be found on a local poll tax register. Some councils, such as Norwich, have already introduced such a "passport", which entitles local people to reduced car park rates or swimming pool entry and recoups higher fees from those who don't pay their rates to the city. Even if matters stop short of a *national*

identity card, there is nothing to stop local authorities from tying access to services — libraries, leisure facilities, meals-on-wheels, home helps — to evidence of poll tax payment. It's a logical consequence of the principle behind the tax but could well mean that needy people are afraid to use or ask for such services for fear of getting onto a register which will be used to hunt them down.

"Why should you have the right to vote if you evade taxes?" Tory journalists have been asking National Council for Civil Liberties chief, Sarah Spencer. "The appropriate penalty for tax evasion," she points out, "should not be disenfranchisement." Or, one might add, children's right to borrow books from the library.

Janet Hadley

Poll Tax II: bitter fudge

THE INCREASINGLY fierce disagreement within the Labour Party in Scotland about whether or not non-payment should form part of the campaign against the poll tax looks likely to be fudged at the Scottish Annual Conference in Perth this weekend. Over the past few months the Scottish Labour leadership has been at pains to argue that non-payment would be counter-productive, diversionary, and could threaten jobs. (See *NS* 8 January 1988.)

Saturday afternoon's debate on the poll tax — certainly the Conference's key debate — will probably be presented with a three-way choice: a composite motion which neither implicitly nor explicitly opposes non-payment; a second composite which endorses non-payment; and the Scottish executive statement which "does not rule out a non-payment campaign" in the future.

Unless trade union opposition to non-payment is significantly stronger than expected, the Conference will back the executive's position and effectively postpone the argument. The only possible upset could come from the ever-mercurial Transport and General Workers' Union, which is coming under strong pressure to oppose non-payment outright.

The Conference will also witness the first public signs of dissatisfaction within the constituency parties over the Scottish Labour leadership. A new soft left internal pressure group known as Scottish Labour Action is holding its first meeting in Perth where it hopes to attract substantial support for its radical devolutionist stance. Its originators — eight prominent constituency activists — believe that there is widespread dismay over the poor performance of the Scottish parliamentary front bench and the Scottish executive.

They want the Labour Party to campaign on the basis that the government has no mandate in Scotland. Mass non-payment of the poll tax is seen as one way of rejecting the Tories' right to govern north of the border. Dick Douglas, the hitherto solidly centrist Labour MP for Dunfermline West, has emerged as an unlikely ally: he resigned as chairperson of the Scottish group of Labour MPs last month in protest at the leadership's rejection of a poll tax non-payment campaign.

If the Conference fudges a decision, it will have to wait for a special recall conference in the autumn: by then time will be running out for the organisation of a non-payment campaign, as the first poll tax will be levied in Scotland in April 1989.

Rob Edwards

Westminster cemetery scandal

ONCE QUITE shameless in its push for privatisation, Westminster Council has been profoundly embarrassed by the launch of a Fraud Squad enquiry into its activities. The enquiry is the result of a ratepayers' revolt over the council's sale to a developer of hundreds of acres of cemetery and valuable building land for an agreed sale price of 15 pence. The original purchaser went bankrupt within a week, and the land has since changed hands several times.

Westminster's leader, Tory Lady Shirley Porter, seems determined not to learn from history. The Victorians realised more than a century ago that you couldn't privatise death. An ancient free market in graves led to overcrowding and revolting practices: gravediggers died from fumes in graves 20 or more coffins deep, bodies already buried were mutilated for new graves to be made, and fresh bones found their way up to the surface.

No one could be sure of a repose undisturbed by bodysnatchers or gravediggers. Graveyards already over-full were made to yield high profits by the sale of coffins for firewood, spreading smallpox and other diseases. Human bones were used for land infill or bone-meal fertiliser. In London, graveyard levels were raised so high that there was seepage through the walls of nearby houses, and yet further deaths.



Something had to be done. In the 1830s the Victorians started to build huge necropolises on the outskirts of cities — like those Westminster city council sold to private developers for a total of 15p. They were financed privately by venture capital and were designed to supersede the old inner city graveyards (many of which were closed and turned into parks). The new cemeteries were highly lucrative at first. But their proprietors found that the law of diminishing returns started to operate as their land filled up with graves and imposing monuments. Eventually maintenance costs outran income. Profits had been pocketed by shareholders and proprietors were driven to such expedients as burying paupers in the paths before bankruptcy loomed.

Macaulay, in other respects a free trader,

warned parliament in 1846 that non-interference in market forces was a principle "which cannot be applied without great restriction where the public health or the public morality is concerned". In the end, ordinary people simply could no longer afford to pay to die privately, and the cemeteries were municipalised. In many ways this was an ideal solution. They provided open spaces for wildlife, and lungs for the cities they served. They were managed by public servants tastefully and well, drew little attention to themselves and gave quiet repose for millions of ratepayers. They were cheap to run and neither burial fees nor maintenance costs were exorbitant. They were a genuinely decent answer to the burial problem arrived at by a process of rational historical evolution.

Now the old Victorian values have returned with a vengeance. The Westminster free marketeers have negligently destroyed the equilibrium, taking the dead hostage in the name of free-market ideology. In one privatised cemetery in the 1980s an area in which more than 8,000 Londoners had been buried was levelled, the surface raised two feet, and the lot resold for fresh shallow burials.

After a stormy meeting last week, Lady Porter survived a vote of censure by only two votes and was forced to apologise to all concerned. A demand by outraged ratepayers that the land be compulsorily purchased back is now receiving serious attention. The revolt may yet force the new privateers to think again.

Ruth Richardson

Ruth Richardson's book, Death, Dissection and the Destitute, was published in January by Routledge.

Press closures in Israel

SYSTEMATIC TORTURE and harassment by Israeli armymen of Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza was going on before the current uprising, according to Michal Schwartz, editor of *Derech Hanitzotz*, a Hebrew weekly published from Jerusalem. The paper and its fortnightly Arab counterpart, *Tariq A Sharara*, were closed down by Israeli authorities on 18 February.

The authorities closed the publications down under the British Mandate Emergency Regulations (1945), which were in fact withdrawn when the British left the Middle East in 1948. They endow the District Commissioner, whom Schwartz described as a clerk of the administration, to cancel a paper's licence without legal procedure and without giving a reason.

Michal Schwartz was on a European tour to gather support for her weekly, which was subject to censorship and other forms of harassment by military authorities, when the closure orders were issued. They stated that from material he had seen, the Commissioner had reason to believe that the paper had "real linkage" with a PLO front.

Michal Schwartz, however, contends that the decision was a political one and sets a dangerous precedent. The papers had taken an independent stand, arguing for the democratisation of Israeli society. Since the beginning of the uprising they had been devoting considerable space to coverage of events in the occupied territories, and had become a major source of information for Israeli and foreign journalists, while attracting the peace forces within Israel.

Stories of torture of Arabs by the Israeli Army in the occupied territories were published in the two papers in September. According to Schwartz, journalists in the Israeli national dailies knew of the torture, some had investigated particular cases but chose not to publish. When the military censor objected to publication of articles on Israeli army brutality in her papers, Schwartz brought out a poster of photographs of torture victims, including teenage boys.

Derech Hanitzotz and *Tariq A Sharara* were first in exposing cases of scores of miscarriages and the death of one pregnant woman due to the teargassing in the occupied territories since December. Refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza have been gassed from the air. The military censor at first objected to the papers printing these stories but relented when editor Schwartz threatened to challenge the order in the High Court.

Schwartz describes Israeli military censorship as quite arbitrary, often carried out without explanation, and very dependent on the mood of the military officer in charge. While Israeli papers have to submit articles on sensitive issues, the Arab papers have to submit *everything*, including advertisements for weddings.

The Hebrew edition of her paper has been published since 1982 and the Arabic since 1986. The charges they made against the military authorities for harassment had come up before a Parliamentary Committee, which had summonsed the District Commissioner to testify. He chose to close the papers down four days before he was to appear. The day before the closure, a Palestinian journalist from *Tariq A Sharara* was arrested and not allowed to see a lawyer for several days.

Michal Schwartz cut short her visit to London after hearing of the closures. She said staff were determined to continue publication in any legal way possible, and, in fact, the papers have since appeared under a different name.

Joseph Maliakan

Voting for health not wealth

THE LABOUR PARTY in Birmingham is giving Jane and Joe Public an opportunity to choose between a tax cut or more cash for the National Health Service in a unique ballot this Saturday 12 March.

This comes just two weeks after 25,000 plus members of the General Municipal Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union in the Midlands sent postcards to 10 Downing Street asking the Prime Minister to "have a heart" and provide more money for underfunded health services.

Ballot organiser John Clark said that the city-wide vote, involving at least one hundred thousand people, had been organised following the success of two polls in Conservative-held suburbs of Birmingham last month. Both produced 97 per cent majorities in favour of more funds for the NHS in preference to tax cuts in Nigel Lawson's budget, due on 15 March.

Of 1282 people who took part in the first in Northfield outside a busy branch of Sainsbury's, only 29 opted for a tax cut.

And of 714 votes cast in the second in Kings Norton outside a shopping centre, just 24 wanted a tax cut.

"These ballots were not political events," said Clark. "There was no indication that they had been organised by the Labour Party. We had all sorts of people taking part, from nurses off the night shift to pensioners and even one chap in a white Rolls Royce, but there was no way of distinguishing the party politics of voters."

"Defending the NHS is part of the Labour Party socialism that is about caring for people, but I would have been as happy to see the Tories or Liberals organise it."

Rosemary Brady

If the caption fits No 58



I don't expect you lot out there to have noticed one of the most important anniversaries of our time — 36 years of wedded bliss for Ron 'n Nance. Apparently they later spent a "quiet, romantic evening at home". Speech or thinks bubbles please on a post card by Monday, 21 March. Ten-pound book token for the winner.

No 56: Winner



Mrs T. and waxwork (in unison): "I can assure you that nuclear electricity has absolutely no side effects." (*Brian Ruth, London.*) Runner-up: Mrs T: "Now I know some of you have been wondering about my successor . . ." (*Noel Petty, Cleveland.*)

Yah booh, mine's bigger than yours

FROM THE Atlantic to the Urals, NATO outnumbers the Warsaw Pact by about 90,000 troops — that is, by about four per cent. It all depends how you calculate the relevant area: choose a smaller one and you get a Warsaw Pact advantage of about 200,000. Yet even the hawkish *Economist* has conceded that "if it had the same number of soldiers, NATO could probably win a conventional war with the Warsaw Pact because its equipment is better."

"They", we are often and tediously told, have far more tanks than us. But half the Warsaw Pact's tanks date from the 1950s and are virtually obsolete. Areas where NATO is clearly superior are simply disregarded: the British, French and Americans can field around 20 aircraft carriers, 14 of them giant ones. The Soviets have three, and none of them is very good. The Soviet Marines number 20,000; the US Marines alone are 190,000.

Ah, says NATO: ours are on two sides of the Atlantic, whereas theirs are all in Europe. But the Eastern European infrastructure is so bad that it is probably *quicker* for us to fly our troops in from America than it is for them to transport theirs across Eastern Europe. A substantial part of the Soviet military machine is also bottled up facing China.

All this is blithely ignored by the first communi-

que issued by NATO's leaders during their summit last week, which talks of "the conventional imbalance in Europe" and "the Warsaw Pact's superiority in key conventional weapons systems".

Hence the need to "keep up-to-date" our tactical nuclear weapons — as the English version of the second communique has it (the German version speaks of keeping them "at an appropriate level") — "where necessary", (the Germans having lost the battle to have it "if necessary"). "Everyone recognises that you do not deter with obsolete or obsolescent weapons," growled Mrs Thatcher to the press corps.

Yet on one level this too is nonsense. There is nothing obsolete about NATO's tactical nukes. They can explode: they still deter. The military would simply prefer to have *better* weapons — and the weapons industry works hard at creating an argument in favour of them. Lord Carrington, NATO's Secretary-General, implied that the up-to-date/appropriate weapons would be more innocuous than the current ones: they would be "of less destructive power, but more accurate". This is true, but equally important is the fact that they are likely to have a much longer range: the replacement for the Lance missile will have at least double the current range of 70 miles. As "dual" weapons — with the possibility of being either conventional or nuclear capable, they are also destabilising.

The German desire to see tactical weapons reduced is founded on a desire not to see German soil turned into a nuclear wasteland. The INF deal,

which negotiated away the Pershing-2 missiles, has made it much harder for the Germans' preferred option — rapid escalation to strategic strikes into Russia — to be put into operation. Early nuclear warfare in Europe is much more likely. So why don't the Germans want modernisation of tactical weapons, which, having a longer range, are less likely to land on Germany?

The military answer is that there is no sensible mid-point between targeting the fighting troops and striking the heart of Russia. Poland and Eastern Czechoslovakia, where anything just short of the INF limits would fall, are not militarily significant. The political answer, it seems, is that the Germans are trying to capitalise on INF momentum; to push through tactical nuclear disarmament while the political will is still there. This is so different from the British/American desire to find loopholes to INF — sea and air-launched cruise missiles, for example — that it seems unlikely that NATO unity can be held together with linguistic fudge for very long.

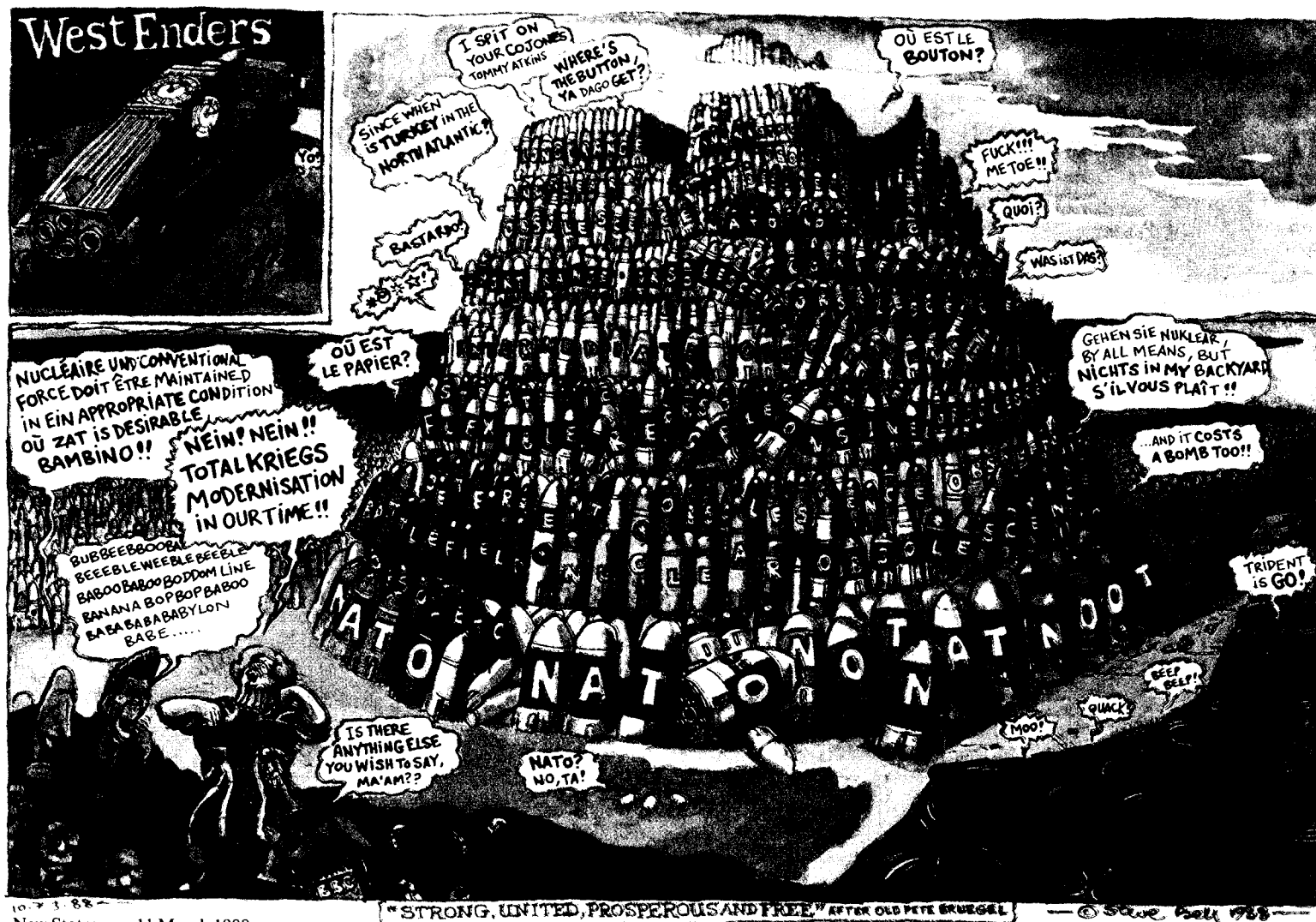
Jolyon Jenkins

Public Meeting

THE MEDIA & THE BIRMINGHAM SIX

Charles Tremayne (*World in Action*), Bob Woffinden
15th March, 7.30 pm
Green Room (near Oxford Road station) Manchester

Campaign for Press & Broadcasting Freedom



"Burn it down"

THE SMELL of burning books is in the air. Reading Matters Bookshop in Haringey, North London, has received numerous threats to bomb it, burn it down and kill the workers. And at Haringey council meeting on Monday night, where the Tory group tabled a motion to suspend the £25,000-a-year grant to the bookshop, there were chants of "burn it down" in the public gallery.

The context of the campaign against the bookshop is clause 29 due to be enacted in June. Haringey Tories pre-empted it with a demand for an emergency meeting of the council on 25 April to discuss closure of the lesbian and gay unit, abolishing the schools curriculum working party, banning promotion of homosexuality to children . . . and ceasing grant aid to Reading Matters, which they strangely describe as a "homosexual group".

Soon after, a story appeared in the *Sunday Telegraph*, followed by others in the *Daily Mail*, *Sun* and *Star*, and centred on *The Scum*, an anarchist paper said to be found in the shop which carried cartoons with lines like "everyone knows that dead cops float". The *Sunday Telegraph* story began by saying "children as young as five are being encouraged to read anarchist cartoon books and homosexual propaganda . . ."

Bookshop worker Caroline Rault said that she had never seen *Scum* and that "it could have got into the shop because we're extremely understaffed and so rely on volunteers. It can't have been in the children's section, however, because we are particularly careful about that area and only stock non-violent books."

Pam Emmerson, a member of the shop's management committee, said the shop was one of the very few where teachers could buy books in a dozen languages spoken by London children, for use in teaching English as a second language. "Compare this to the books available for children in WH Smith's like *Weapons and Warfare*; *The Super Book of Battles*; and *War Stories*."

Malcolm Glynn, a Haringey parent governor (and vigorous right-wing campaigner) told the *Hornsey Journal* that he was responsible for leaking the *Scum* story to the press and indeed he was credited with research on one *Sunday Telegraph* story. Betty Sheridan, leader of the Parents Rights Group, which has campaigned against positive images of homosexuals in the borough, said that she too wanted "to see the shop close down", though denied "being involved in a smear campaign". There is no suggestion that either Glynn or Sheridan has been involved in the threats of violence or other anonymous letters.

Desire to see the shop and others like it close is not confined to local activists, however. On 1 March Mrs Thatcher told MPs that parliament was discussing new laws to prevent councils from giving money to such ventures. And there is speculation on the council that Reading Matters will be used as a test case for Clause 29 to see if the word "promote" homosexuality can be pinned on it.

Jane Dibblin

See Sarah Benton, p.14.

POLITICAL SKETCH

Where's the anchovy paste?

Edward Pearce

THE RISK EXISTS that poor Ken Clarke may be recalled in history as Cheops building with eggboxes. Ken's Valley of the Kings is a twelve point non-plan relating to the inner cities, or Innercities as we tend nowadays to call them. Unfortunately for the wretched minister, Mrs Thatcher had gone on record at a press conference earlier in the day saying that there was no new departure in the proposals. Indeed the idea of a statement seems at first to have been frowned on. They should have gone on frowning.

One's slender esteem for the affable, boisterous Mr Clarke grew anorexic and skeletal as he crunched among his eggboxes, new Urban District Corporations, a simplified grant for private-sector developments, a couple of small road links, various small firm agency developments, the sort of strenuous inertia by which Lord Young wins his reputation for bringing to Our Lady of Finchley "answers not problems". As answers go they amount to a mere rearrangement of the coffins in the vault. There is no significant new money but we get a full belly of "drives", "initiatives" and "action teams". Mr Clarke, sweating with loyalty, actually referred at one point to this "action document" — not so much Ken Clarke, more Clark Kent!

A barrister by profession, Mr Clarke always reminds me of that eminent Silk who entitled one chapter of his memoirs "My First Client to be Hanged". This admittedly is optimism, but if you had done something serious (or in Lord Young's case a rather flashy nothing at all), it would be a mistake to expect the Paymaster General to get you off. Being attacked by Mr Clarke is rather like being belaboured over the head with a pig's bladder. He attempted, by means of good natured comic scorn, to distract attention from the shrivelled contents of the statement. It had been heralded earlier by distribution to the press of the sort of expensive high gloss printing job normally associated with prospectuses for Parca Spuriosa villa developments in the less desirable bits of the Costa Del Sol.

So thin is it in content that to make up a dozen frail headings someone had thrown in "A series of breakfast presentations up and down the country starting in Newcastle on April 13th." Lucky old Newcastle! Quite why eggs and orange juice with a preoccupied junior minister on a day return should count as an initiative, no one but the campaign-obsessed public-relators in the administration can comprehend.

Consequently Labour had rather a good day. They abstained from shouting and screaming. Bryan Gould set the tone with the right sort of noble scorn for the high lacquered void we were being offered. There was no new money to speak of, no involvement for the community, the White Paper Mr Clarke had wanted had been pre-

emptively torn up. The minister had not the faintest idea of how to face up to the problem. Mrs Claire Short had a nice succinct way through the jargon with her observation that "deprived inner city areas" was only a term of art for concentrations of poor people; and what had made them poor if not unemployment, low wages and poor housing stock?

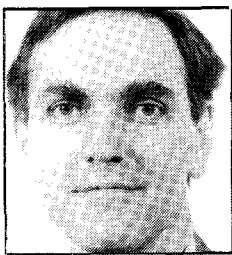
On all social and urban issues the Tories are less well equipped to argue than they would have been ten years ago. They have so very few urban MPs. It was symbolic that the rather frail figure of Anthony Steen cast his beating filmy wings before the government as chairman of their backbench inner cities group. Mr Steen fled Liverpool five years ago and is now gratefully returned by a strip of South Devon. Such big city Tories as there are frequently display, like Tony Beaumont Dark, alarming expertise running counter to Lord Young's meringue-textured solutions. Why was there an assault on the green belt, he asked, when harder-to-work but more socially useful sites on derelict town land stood begging? The minister promised to refer his honourable friend's question to another, and Right Honourable, friend.

FROM ALL ANGLES the government had a disagreeable afternoon, making trumpeting noises about their approach to a social crisis which they are visibly incapable of coping with. Electorally it doesn't matter. The underclass which is replacing the working class in Britain is huge as a problem, entirely manageable as a piece of the electorate. Into the bargain, as Tony Banks astutely pointed out, this latticework of agencies looks like a long-term quasi-administrative substitute for local government.

But what we are left with, in terms of concentrations of poor people, is "a major new initiative", the sort of thing which a share-pushing teeny executive would describe as "an exciting development". It is, and nobody knows this better than Mr Clarke, so much cake architecture, action teams and breakfast presentations, drives against crime worth all of £2.3 millions, more men from the ministry "advising and helping residents".

To offer such watered water and to do it so patronisingly at the same time as the confiscatory swoop of the poll tax, with urban housing in its calamitous state and employment standing in such places like a painted ship upon a painted ocean, is pure Lord Young. If you put a duff property developer in charge of a major department you get an expensive prospectus. It isn't just a question of where's the beef, where in all this is the anchovy paste?

It would have been satisfactory if the other main item of Monday had been met even a bit critically by Labour. It is understood that if the Opposition front bench had offered any reservations about the Gibraltar shootings all the dogs of patriotism would have been barking. But, however hateful the IRA and however probable a murderous intent, the people shot were unarmed. To those of us who have sat up all night to read Stalker through, it leaves an unpleasant taste, the taste perhaps of a roll-your-own execution. It should have been possible for the front bench with circumspect civility to have asked the obvious difficult questions. The unlawful shooting of even the worst of men is still unlawful. □



BEN PIMLOTT

Thatcherism in its Maoist phase is unleashing unpredictable forces

WHEN TORY Central Office declares its preference for a "moderate" candidate over a reactionary head-banger, as it did before the Young Conservative poll last week, we need to pay attention. Can the government be going soft? The explanation, as you will have guessed, is not nearly so appealing. The hierarchy's cool-it call to the green-wellie brigade reflects the harsh new reality of Tory power struggles. Since last June, the centre of gravity has moved to the right. So, far from indicating a liberalisation, the rise of the Tory loonies — and the need to resist them — is a symptom of the lack of effective opposition, of any kind, to the government's recent campaigns.

Do not blame Neil Kinnock: there was never much scope for the *official* Opposition, in what Lord Hailsham once aptly called our elective dictatorship — at least at this stage in a parliament. In the past, however, there were a number of other restraints: the civil service, local government, the trade unions, even the media. All these have now been neutralised or reduced to a state of quivering sycophancy. As for the electorate, most ministers now believe that whatever the government does, the Tories will always win.

There used to be two other limits to inner party, and especially Prime Ministerial, absolutism. One was Establishment ethos, a soporific substance, like old port, and good at cooling ideological ardour. The other, potentially most important, consisted of the government's own backbenchers. Today, the ethos is no more, while the Tory backbenches offer little except knighthood hunters and ministerial hopefuls.

Gone are the days when the parliamentary party was a quagmire of patrician sentimentality about the deserving poor. Since the election, the hard (ie wet) left has been reduced to a handful of embittered notables, whose sole cabinet representative, Peter Walker, serves out time as manager of a Mongolian power-station. Apart from Edward Heath and Sir Ian Gilmour, there are the three Xes — Hugh Dykes, David Knox and Robin Hicks — who glumly toast the memory of the late Lord Stockton. But these are gamblers who went on obstinately, and for too long, backing the wrong number. Though their constituency associations charitably tolerate them as eccentrics, they have few important friends at Westminster.

What used to be the mushy middle of the Tory party is also greatly reduced. There are some with small majorities who get anxious about their marginal constituents. Doctrinal doubts, however, are becoming rarer. Keynesianism has become a shameful vice and clean-living members of the Prime Minister's team like Douglas Hurd, George Younger, Norman Fowler, Kenneths Baker and Clark, have long since dissociated themselves from it.

Typical of the rising generation is Christopher Patten, once errand-boy between the Prime Minister and Heath. At Overseas Development, he has risen to the challenge: in contrast to his dourly principled, old Etonian (ex-*New Society* editing)

predecessor, Timothy Raison, he has shown that even so unpromising an outpost can be turned into a pulpit. Recently, in Africa, he was to be heard lecturing the inhabitants of some of the world's poorest states on the need to link aid to market economics. He should go far. Even the maverick Heseltine, who has nothing to fear from the Prime Minister because he has no hope of office until she goes, has found it prudent to trim to the right. Hence his curious little book, published last year, *Where There's a Will*, and some impressive television tub-thumping in support of the American slave-labour scheme, workfare.

THE PROBLEM for the Tory soft left, indeed, mirrors Labour's own dilemma. It is not just that would-be critics no longer see much point in stepping out of line. It is also that it is becoming exceedingly difficult to gain attention for old-fashioned tunes in the face of an innovative leadership that is so damned popular.

“This is a government, and above all a Prime Minister, that now believes it can break any convention, dispatch any sacred cow to the abattoir, with absolute impunity. Change and reform have become ends in themselves and the rhetoric of dynamism has become the touchstone of party patriotism”

Much of what Mrs Thatcher is now doing is the sort of thing which estate agents, ten or 20 years ago, grumbled to barmaids at the Conservative Club *ought* to be done and bloody well *would* be done if they ever were in power. Now the estate-agent tendency rules, and the One Nation fellows are left buying the drinks if they are not — like eager Kenneth Baker — scribbling out lyrics in the new idiom.

There are a few of the old-timers who, in their cups, wonder hopefully whether she may not now be going over the top. The present, adrenalinising, ego-expanding crusade, they argue, goes much further than Thatcherism in the first two parliaments. The secret of the Prime Minister's success has been that, unlike the hapless Labour leadership, she doesn't stay awake at night totting up opinion poll statistics on her fingers. She acts and expects to take public opinion with her. Council house sales and privatisation were ideological, not voter-orientated, initiatives. The “popular capitalism” slogan came later. Its impact, however, stoked the furnace of her messianism — perhaps dangerously.

This is a government, and above all a Prime

Minister, that now believes it can break any convention, dispatch any sacred cow to the abattoir, with absolute impunity. In the present mood of exuberant iconoclasm, change and reform have become ends in themselves, and the rhetoric of dynamism has become the touchstone, not just of virility, but also of party patriotism.

Yet it may be, say some, that the very source of her apparent strength may become a fatal flaw. The removal of restraint has also meant the removal of protection. The contrast, once again, is with the Labour Party — and this time not entirely to Labour's disadvantage. Labour is a party of rules, majorities, electoral colleges, vested interests, holy scriptural texts. The Tories, on the other hand, have no constitution. Their conference is a rally, not a forum. They have no such thing as party policy, and they have no mechanism for the voicing of loyal (or disloyal) criticism. Tory loyalty has always meant obedience. Such a code worked satisfactorily when there was a presumption of consensus-seeking. From the Prime Minister's point of view, it continues to work in the charismatic, non-consensual present. But in the long run it is highly unstable.

It is not just that permanent revolutions are, in practice, impermanent. It is also that Thatcherism, in its Maoist phase, has unleashed forces it may not be able to control. Among the estate agents, the Thatcher upheaval has opened a Pandora's box of unrealisable aspirations. Already (in health, for instance, where the Tories are proposing to smash up the structure they created) there is a sense of the government meeting itself coming back. Will the Education Bill actually raise “standards” in schools? Will the poll tax really solve the problem of local government finance? Will private enterprise tidy up the inner cities? There are too many chickens which, sooner or later, are liable to wing their way home to roost.

So argue the Conservative wishful-thinkers privately, and they may yet be right. For the time being, however, all that the Prime Minister confronts in her own party to the left of her is an ocean of silence. There is now, literally, no alternative. What would happen if she was run over by a bus? Once upon a time, a reversion of the crown to the wets seemed likely. Today it seems more probable that Thatcherism, like Gaullism in France, will outlive its creator.

It is even suggested that if the bus left her breathing, she would use her enormous authority (as Macmillan did in 1963) to influence the succession. The name that is frequently mentioned in this connection is the still-influential, and ambitious, Norman Tebbit. That is another reason why the most sensible tactic for Tory careerists, unless they take the very long view, is to do what they are told. It is also why as we have recently seen in the scuffle over the chair of what was once a non-ideological marriage bureau — the only significant pressure from within the Conservative Party comes from the bonkers, and exceedingly nasty, ultra-right. □

Dependency culture: welfare for the wealthy

Each Budget since 1979 has enriched the already rich amid a rising tide of poverty.

GORDON BROWN describes the overgrown mass of tax loopholes, shelters and reliefs for the wealthy to which the Chancellor will add on Tuesday. On pp12-13 Jolyon Jenkins provides a do-it-yourself Budget kit, an exposition of the theory of incentives and a guide to the "other welfare state" of company perks

AS A NEW 27-bedroom hotel for the homeless flourishes in West London, it might seem that London's businessmen are beginning to take a long and sympathetic look at the problems of the capital's 30,000 without permanent residence. Has

business suddenly rediscovered charity? Has the conscience of the rich reawakened after a century of state provision?

No. There is a less momentous explanation: a few investors have spotted a tax dodge that allows them to make an astonishing double killing out of accommodation for the homeless.

The investors are doing exceptionally nicely because the taxpayer is coughing up for both the revenue and the capital investment involved. Almost all the income of the 27-room hotel and its sister hotel, the Townhouse, on the Cromwell Road, comes from board and lodging bills of up to £273 a week per room paid by local councils. The real shock is in the capital funding: £600,000 of the £1 million needed to buy and refurbish the Townhouse has come in tax concessions, with a handy windfall still to come when the building, which has already increased in value by £450,000, is sold off.

The key to this nice little earner is the Business Expansion Scheme, whereby a score of top-rate

taxpayers have been able to invest up to £40,000 each and set the sum against their tax bills, so that the government effectively contributes £24,000 for each in the form of lost tax revenue — on behalf of all of us, naturally.

The hotel scheme is a characteristic wonder of the Thatcher era: in effect a tax shelter that allows the rich to become richer by means of a partial and inefficient privatised response to the cut-back in housing and social services to the poor. As the scheme's prospectus makes clear, the present high demand for tax-funded bed and breakfast accommodation arises from government-imposed restrictions on local council housing investment. In other words, money that could house the poor instead of warehousing them is being pocketed by the very rich as tax relief.

That little dodge — which has mushroomed in the financing of private hospitals, health clinics, private nursing homes and now even private schools — has a top limit: only £40,000 of any individual's income in any one year can be shielded

Sad tale of redundancy

IT IS CURIOUS that only the poor can be made dependent. A poignant story in the *Financial Times* last month told the sad tale of the former chairman of Britoil, Sir Philip Shelbourne (right), who was made redundant by its sale to BP. His form of redundancy was to be made a consultant. More, he was given a car for life. And a chauffeur. He was given four centre court tickets for the Wimbledon tennis finals each year. He was given four seats every season at Covent Garden opera house. He was given £40,000 a year "in lieu of office and ancillary services". He was given travel and hotel expenses, and private health insurance. *And he was given £92 a day for lunch.*

We can perhaps glimpse this sad case of dependency, flitting wanly in the back of his Daimler between L'Escargot and the Carlton Club, then shuffling miserably on to Covent Garden as the evening shadows lengthen.

John Lloyd



by the Business Expansion Scheme. For those who face even greater difficulties, the recommended choice is investment in Enterprise Zones, where tax-relief rewards for the very, very rich are virtually limitless. Acquire yourself a chunk of an Enterprise Zone and the tax inspector will more or less forget all about you.

Secret property

Land ownership in England is an unofficial (though still very secret) secret, but careful research in the Durham Land Registry has come up with some interesting facts about who owns the land in one local Enterprise Zone, at Middlesbrough.

Some very rich men have found the charms of Middlesbrough quite irresistible. The official explanation is that they have invested in one of Britain's most deprived areas: the truth is that they have found the kind of tax haven you used to have to go to the Dutch Antilles for. Clever little companies have sprouted simply to market such cosy, onshore schemes, and they are doing well. Limitless incomes can be set against tax in the Middlesbrough Enterprise Zone, and in all the others that have been designated in the north, and for the London rich with less of a sense of adventure, there's even one in the Isle of Dogs.

An official report in December put a figure of £150 million lost to the Exchequer on such schemes. That was the figure until 1986; it is now £270 million.

No one doubts that investment in the country's poorest areas is a high priority but no realist in government or outside it can contend that the £270 million frittered away on these tax dodges is money

well spent. Direct investment of such sums in local enterprise can be justified; chucking them at the already rich cannot. Yet in the same week as the report appeared the Chancellor announced an extension of these loopholes to benefit not just individual investors but unit trusts too. As a jubilant investment company official said at the time: "This dramatically opens up to all high-tax-paying investors a market which has only been accessible to the very rich."

Forests of money

If Enterprise zones are not to your taste, forestry offers equally attractive — and now well-publicised — tax breaks, with a string of reliefs for planting, maintaining, felling and selling trees that no one actually needs. There's even a £100 grant paid by the government for each acre you plant.

What's perhaps more worrying is that the Exchequer is now losing £35 million a year to pop stars, politicians and sports personalities for planting the wrong kind of trees in the wrong places (like the environmentally important Flow Country in Scotland) and for the wrong reasons.

Another use of tax perks is available in the form of Executive Share Options. These have allowed 50,000 income tax payers to avoid £100 million-worth of their potential responsibilities to the Exchequer each year for the last three years. The scheme showers windfalls on the already rich by allowing boardroom purchase, at prices fixed at an earlier day, of shares for sale later at substantial profit — free from income tax (see p13). All our best known directors, from Ralph Halpern (Burton) and Alan Sugar (Amstrad) downwards, are major beneficiaries. The leadership of newly priva-

tised companies doesn't do too badly either: British Telecom executives have share options worth £2.7 million — currently representing about £750,000 in profits.

And then there's Bed and Breakfasting. Nothing, it should be emphasised, to do with stale sheets, limp cornflakes, DHSS handouts or the West London hotel scheme. Bed and Breakfasting allows City institutions and wealthy individuals to create book losses by selling shares or unit trusts late one night and buying them back the next morning. Cost to less enterprising taxpayers? An estimated £900 million this year alone.

It's not as if the rich need the extra money. For the last eight years they have done very well indeed. The 400,000 at the very top who earn in excess of £80,000 and who now have shares worth more than £100,000 have under Mrs Thatcher doubled their wealth, giving them, on average, around £500,000 each.

The theory behind giving them more is the simplistic Tory one: that capital shall flourish, that industry and innovation thereby profit and enterprise be justly rewarded. The realities are both more mundane and more squalid. The rewards are for ingenuity in tax avoidance only. The economy derives no benefit from tax provisions so loosely, even whimsically, geared to the need for genuine investment. The only real beneficiaries are the already rich, who so far have shown no signs of becoming any more productive — only richer. □

Gordon Brown MP is Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

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Clinging to Nanny Employer's skirts

It's not the poor who are hooked into "dependency culture", but the rich.

JOLYON JENKINS analyses their guilty secret of company perks, explains how the Chancellor can make them work harder for the same money, and provides the tools to construct your own Budget

NO ONE really approves of tax-free perks for employees: the left frowns on them because they disproportionately benefit the rich, and the right disapproves of them because they distort the free market. British executives, we're often told, are among the lowest paid in Europe, but this ignores the fact that they're probably the most perk-laden. Add them on, and earnings rise towards the top of the league. For those earning more than £35,000 in

the financial sector, "fringe benefits now amount to more than half their salary again, and even for those on £15,000 in the poor-relation industrial and service sector, perks are commonly 40 per cent of pay."⁽¹⁾

All this grew up during the 70s, supposedly as a result of Labour's high marginal tax rates, but then stayed on after taxes were cut. The Inland Revenue has supposedly tightened up on the taxation of perks but loopholes still exist. Although it's impossible to arrive at a total figure for the cost to the taxpayer, it's clear that they amount to an enormous hidden welfare state for the rich — certainly billions rather than millions.

Among the most visible of perks are company cars. A recent survey⁽²⁾ shows that 95 per cent of senior managers and 56 per cent of managers are given them. According to an analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies⁽³⁾ this amounts to a tax subsidy by the government of about £1.1 billion a

year. Company cars (and the petrol they use) are theoretically treated as a benefit in kind and are taxed as non-cash income, but there are several anomalies:

☐ Neither employee nor employer pays National Insurance Contributions on this benefit.

☐ The employer is allowed to set the depreciation of the car against the corporation tax on profits — unlike ordinary income payments to employees.

☐ The benefit to the employee depends on the quantity of business use and not the proportion. The more the employee drives the car at work, the less tax he or she pays, regardless of the amount of private use.

Cars are just one instance of a general phenomenon: that while non-cash benefits are generally taxed, they are not subject to National Insurance (which is of course a tax in all but name) and

Be a chancellor

WE PRESENT below the *New Statesman* D-I-Y Budget kit. It's very simple: use the first table to generate money, and the second one to spend it. (Of course, this is a gross oversimplification, because many of the items are interdependent: if you raise/spend money in one way it will affect the amounts you can raise/spend in another. Too bad.) The first table only includes items that can be reasonably accurately quantified, so ignores, for example, savings from closing the tax concessions on executive share options.

Playing by Lawson's Rules, you probably also have an extra £4 billion to spend. If, unlike him, you are prepared to borrow, say, £4 billion, and are optimistic about revenue, you could have as much as £11 billion. The choice is yours.

Generating income

Abolish all pensions tax concessions (on premiums and investment income)	£7.1 billion
Abolish all mortgage tax relief	£4.75 billion
Abolish married man's allowance	£4.6 billion
As above, but for under 65 year olds only	£3.9 billion
Abolish capital gains tax relief on proceeds of house sales	£2.5 billion

Abolish the ceiling for employees' NI contributions	£2.25 billion
Remove tax perks on company cars	£1.1 billion
Increase all excise duties by rate of inflation	£600 million
Levy a 1 per cent tax on all wealth over £200,000	£500 million
Reduce pension tax relief to the basic rate	£500 million
Restrict mortgage tax relief to the basic rate	£400 million
Abolish capital gains	£260 million

tax relief (for those paying any at all)	
Close loopholes on Business Expansion Scheme	£100 million
Put a penny on a pint of beer	£75 million
Remove tax relief on profit sharing schemes	£60 million
Put a penny on a gallon of petrol	£55 million
Close loopholes on enterprise zone industrial buildings	£25 million

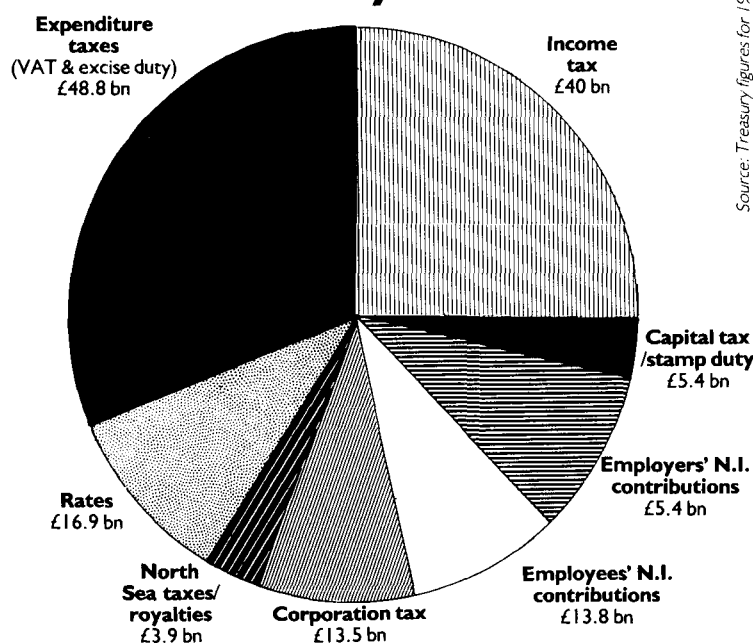
Put a penny on 20 cigarettes	£25 million
Close loopholes on woodlands plantations	£15 million

Sources: Inland Revenue and Institute for Fiscal Studies.

Spending it

Increase single person's allowance to half of married man's allowance, and make allowances transferable	£4.5 billion
As above, but make allowances only partly transferable	£1.2 billion
Raise all personal allowances by 10 per cent	£2.05 billion
Cut basic tax rate by a penny	£1.25 billion
Increase tax allowances in line with inflation	£940 million
Restore annual spending on public housing to 1979 levels	£4 billion
Fund NHS pay rises to "realistic levels" (Hospital Alert)	£500 million
Restore NHS underfunding since 1980 (Social services select committee)	£1.9 billion
Restore social security payments to 1979 levels (CPAG)	£2 billion
Restore child benefit to 1979 levels (CPAG)	£245 million
Double the size of the new DHSS social fund	£203 million
Restore proposed Housing Benefit cuts	£650 million
Don't increase prescription charges	£10 million

Where the money comes from



Tax and incentives

"Look, you say I have made the rich richer. I have done no such thing. I have enlarged opportunity. I have given incentive because unless this country is a country to which able people want to come and in which able people want to stay we do not have the motor to pull the rest of us up."

Mrs Thatcher, *Panorama*,
25 January 1988

ACCORDING TO the government, poor people work harder if you pay them less, but rich people only work harder if you pay them more. So benefits get reduced and wage councils are abolished to stop young people "pricing themselves out of the jobs market", while the government has cut tax for the wealthy to "reward" hard work.

But this hides a multitude of falsehoods and half-truths. According to an expensive study commissioned by the Treasury, (but never published), tax cuts have almost no effect on incentives for the majority of earners, because most people can't alter the amount they earn by doing more work. Seventy nine per cent of people, according to the survey, are unable to work longer hours in their main job.

The rich are often more able to increase their income; but the idea that they need tax cuts to make them work harder is contentious. There are two distinct effects that pull in opposite directions: if people pay less tax then they have more money which they can spend on leisure — and more leisure means less work. At the same time — vulgar Thatcherism — they get more money for their work, and so do more of it.

Theoretical economics says that cutting the *average* rate of tax decreases incentives, while reducing

the *marginal* rate increases them. The marginal rate is the rate which is paid by someone on each additional pound of income; while the average rate is the rate for all their income — including the untaxed personal allowance, tax paid at the basic rate, and any paid at the higher rate. So decreasing higher rates should make top earners work harder — except that by decreasing them you would decrease the average rate too. The clever thing to do is to cut marginal rates while keeping average rates up. You could do this by, for example, stopping higher-rate taxpayers getting more tax relief on mortgage

interest and pension contributions than ordinary taxpayers — so that the tax reliefs are worth the same to everyone, regardless of income.

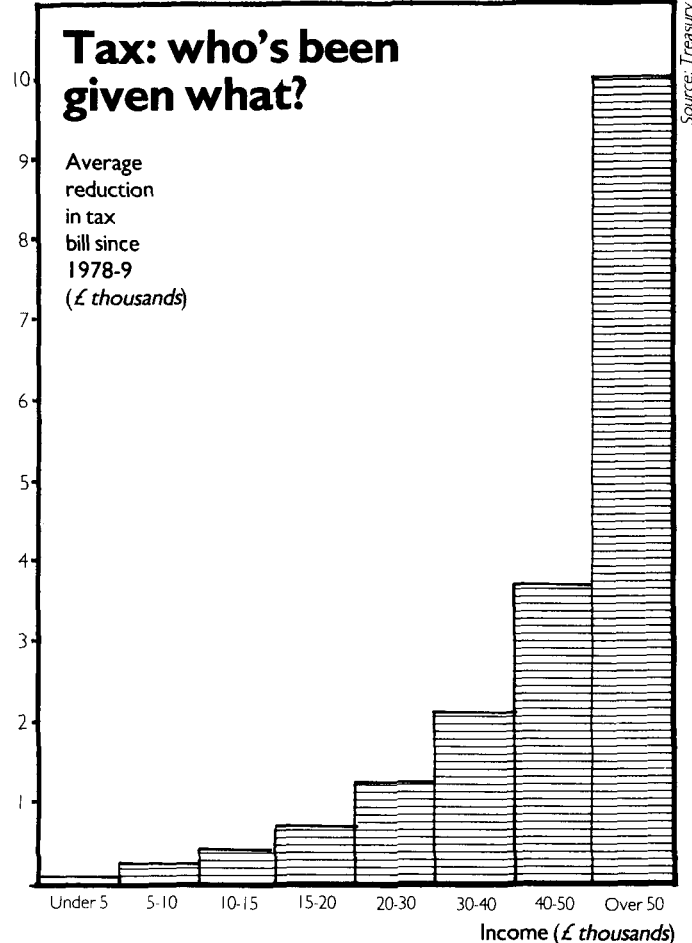
The poverty lobby has been suggesting this for several years. This year the Institute for Fiscal Studies, in its Green Budget, has analysed how the Chancellor could combine this with the politically attractive route of cutting the basic tax rate.

One option analysed by the IFS is to reduce the basic tax to 25 per cent, cut the top rate to 50 per cent (currently 60 per cent) and make tax allowances worth the same to everyone. Lots of richer people would find

themselves in higher tax bands because of the loss of allowances, so IFS proposes to soften the blow by raising the level at which higher rates start to be levied. About 840,000 people would still lose out, but 19 million would gain, at a cost of £2.1 billion. The rich, by and large, would have to work harder to get the same money. The poorish wouldn't.

This involves accepting that very high marginal rates — taxing the rich until the pips squeak — are not a good way of producing extra revenue, though arguably they have their value in terms of brutal egalitarianism. Recent American research suggests that marginal rates of over 50 per cent may be the point at which disincentives start to operate. This is often now elided by the right with the quite separate argument that high marginal tax rates encourage tax avoidance, tax evasion, and company perks. A recent pamphlet published by the Centre for Policy Studies argues that reductions in marginal rates of tax increases the supply of earnings actually declared and so increases revenue. It's a peculiar point to make: if people are finding tax loopholes, legal or illegal, the rational and fair policy is to close them. It is also counter-intuitive to suppose that the rich will stop desperately hiding a little bit of their income from the higher rate and will happily subject all of it to tax at the lower rate.

What about incentives and low earners? The poor face low *average* taxes (because a lot of their income isn't taxed at all), but high *marginal* taxes (27 per cent, the same as everyone else). As Chris Pond of the Low Pay Unit points out, this is a good argument for introducing a special low tax band for the poor, and having a *graduated* system of marginal tax bands throughout the rest of the income range — somewhat different from the IFS proposal.



employers can offset the cost against corporation tax. Senior managers do very well out of this. For example, 84 per cent get free medical insurance, virtually all are given life assurance policies (55 per cent get cover of *four times* their salary — the legal maximum), 53 per cent get their home telephone costs fully or partly met by their company, and 54 per cent receive free newspapers. According to the *Economist*, 30 per cent of them get their golf club fees paid, and foreign travel — supposedly to "conferences" but really for pleasure — is on the up and up. Very nice too, but it hardly meets the Thatcherite aim of allowing people to spend their money as they please: instead of Nanny State, there is Nanny Employer.

Other perks attract explicit income tax exemptions. Pensions contributions made by employers are 100 per cent tax free. Ninety-seven per cent of senior managers get them, and one survey shows 49 per cent of companies giving better pension provisions for their directors than for the workforce as a

whole.⁽⁴⁾ The Inland Revenue has also devised other nice little schemes that disproportionately benefit the bosses:

☐ Employees in approved profit-related pay schemes can get 10 per cent of their total pay, or £1500 if less, tax free.

☐ Golden handshakes: ex-gratia compensation payments for loss of office are tax free for the first £25,000.

Best of all, though, are share options. These give employees the option to buy shares in the company at a future date, but at the *current* (or even lower) price. Share options allow the holder to gamble on the future share price, at absolutely no risk. Only capital gains tax will be payable on the winnings, and at 30 per cent with a "personal allowance" of £6,600 for higher-rate earners this is considerably more attractive than paying income tax. But share options are only for the high flyers: according to

one survey the average minimum salary for eligibility is £29,000 for non-financial organisations and £38,140 for financial ones.⁽⁵⁾

Lower-paid workers are theoretically treated more favourably by the Inland Revenue. If they earn less than £8,500 a year inclusive, all non-cash benefits which the employer is contractually bound to pay are tax free. In practice, of course, those employees are much less likely to get perks. Only 13 per cent of blue-collar workers get free medical insurance, for example. For many, the only perks they are likely to receive are luncheon vouchers — tax free up to 75p a week. ☐

1) Incomes Data Services Top Pay Unit April 1984

2) *Employment-Conditions*, October 1987; Tony Vernon-Harcourt; Monks Partnership Ltd.

3) *Company Cars Taxation*, Mark Ashworth and Andrew Dilnot, Fiscal Studies, November 1987.

4) *Board and senior management remuneration 1988*, Tony Vernon-Harcourt; Monks Partnership Ltd.

5) Incomes Data Services Top Pay Unit April 1987

What are they afraid of?

SARAH BENTON *tells you a few things you didn't know about "promoting" homosexuality*

THE THOUSANDS who flocked through the streets of Manchester last month, ebullient in assertion of their right to be publicly gay, should be a foretaste for the government of an awkward future: its clause 29 (was 27, then 28, now 29) prohibiting local councils "promoting" homosexuality as a "pretended family relationship" might well be flouted by those few councils which have any policy on gay rights. Attorney General Patrick Mayhew and the Director of Public Prosecutions may prefer to leave the pursuit of the unsquashable to local Conservatives — those in Manchester and Haringey have already announced their intention of forcing their councils to stop funding most of their services explicitly for gays and lesbians. But whoever acts, it will be a trial of the government's wisdom as law maker and law enforcer.

So far, the fear and repugnance towards homosexuality and its left-wing "promoters" have flourished in a miasma of misinformation. Any testing in a legal process would have to dispel some of that misinformation. If the feared fantasy figures of homosexual seducers turning the natural world upside down were brought into the light, there to stand revealed as similarly ordinary, vulnerable people, a powerful, inarticulate force behind the backlash the government is promoting might be vitiated.

The cultivated paranoia on which the government needs to feed is most evident on the right of the Conservative Party. It is least restrained when confronted with homosexuality. There is no other issue on which public images are so at variance with the facts. For only a paranoid view of homosexual men and women can actually believe that in schools all over the country they are busy turning the nation's children into queers and pervers. Is Haringey's beleaguered Lesbian and Gay Unit proselytising for homosexuality? "Absolutely not" said one member emphatically. "It's not this unit's belief; no one in the unit believes that; it would be politically ludicrous and dangerous." Nonetheless those preparing the modest policies on gay rights were evidently unprepared for the strain of superstition and fear that was unleashed.

It should be said that no evidence has been found, in any local council, that there has been any evangelism for homosexuality or even any evangelistic literature made available to children. Conservative candidate Doreen Miller insisted on *Any Questions* in February that there was such evidence for Hackney. It can't be found. Hackney council points out that its schools are in ILEA and they have no say in their teaching policies anyway.

More importantly, Hackney points out that in 1986 parliament passed an Education Act which explicitly, in section 18, put sex education in the hands of a school's governing body. That body can accept or reject the recommended policy of a local authority. Not many people know that. But it is the law, and one which is in conflict with clause 29 of

the Local Government Bill which is now moving through parliament. 1986 was the year of defending parents against "lunatic" local authorities. The battle has now moved onto murkier terrain.

Haringey does not yet even have a policy for what is taught about homosexuality in schools for governors to accept or reject; it is waiting for its working party to report later this month. The furore there was over not what had happened but what some people feared might happen.

Mistakes

Labour councillors have made political mistakes when they have adopted policies on gay and lesbian rights. Haringey council met early this month to debate its response to clause 29. "You want to stop heterosexuality," said one Tory councillor. "I quote from your manifesto." Haringey council is not, of course, against heterosexuality. But it has spoken of "heterosexism" in its documents, meaning a system of institutions, practices and ideas which treat homosexual life as inferior and without civic rights. But the difference between heterosexuality and heterosexism is easy to confuse. It is not a difference on which a popular campaign for gay rights can be launched.

And Haringey's Lesbian and Gay Unit did provide a seed for that local outcry on schools. In June 1986 it sent a letter direct to head teachers asking what they planned to do to implement the council's general policy on not discriminating against gays and lesbians and offering to help them work it out. An angry head teacher promptly sent the letter off to the Conservative Party. The first hostile demonstration of Christians and Conservatives then took place, the belief that "gay sex" was taught in Haringey schools already in circulation. A dossier was sent to Education Secretary Kenneth Baker, and official Conservative concern at "gay sex" in schools was then established.

Haringey Labour councillor Philip Jones, chair of the community affairs committee and now also of the lesbian and gay sub-committee, accepts this was a mistake. The unit, enthusiastic, impatient and amateur in the ways of local government, had ignored protocol by issuing its own letter and not going through the education department. The "bureaucracy" which some of the political gay community certainly despise could here have helped protect them. Progress would have been slower. But now, even slow progress is in doubt.

Philip Jones accepts that some councillors, keen to set the standard, nodded through a gay rights policy without thinking through the consequences. It was, in intention, no more than a statement of good non-discriminatory practice by a council. They did not allow themselves to ask whether sexuality was not, in some crucial respects, a different sort of issue.

But it is easy, and to some pleasurable, to say that gays "have only themselves to blame" for the backlash. Digby Anderson, the High Church Director of the right-wing Social Affairs Unit, said on *Weekend World* that homosexuals had "broken" some sort of unwritten agreement that homosexuality would be tolerated if family values

were affirmed; "and as a result they've got the backlash they asked for". Arch-Christians have enjoyed, even been flattered by, the form of gracious upper-class camp which the Queen Mother is said to much appreciate. In its self-parody, it knows its place. In the Lords debate on 1 February, Lord Henderson quoted the late Lord Arran in 1967: "He then asked the homosexual people in the future to comfort themselves quietly and with dignity and to eschew any form of ostentatious behaviour or public flouting [sic]." Henderson continued: "Homosexual people would do well to heed those words, especially now, in case the present backlash turns into something really nasty..." Perhaps this was the "whiff" that Lord Soper scented — the voice of those who urged that if Jews comforted themselves quietly and with dignity, nothing "really nasty" could happen.

Excesses

No doubt many of those now prepared to support clause 29 because of the "excesses" of the gay community, who hasten to say that the fearful warnings of cultural repression are absurdly exaggerated, would shudder at any association with the more rabid warriors against visible homosexuality. The links are there. A group to arrive quickly in Haringey was the New Patriotic Movement, functioning from a secretarial address in the West End. With publicity suggesting Haringey's gay rights policy was all part of an evil conspiracy to undermine society, they set up Parents and Concerned Citizens of Haringey. Its organiser is Hamish Robertson, who works for Causa, the political front for the Moonies. Apart from Haringey, it has also organised a rally in Manchester to exploit the support for James Anderton's anti-homosexual speech. "What is a prophet?" its leaflet asked. "He is one who speaks up boldly in the name of God. Mr James Anderton must be supported for his courageous stand for Christian morality and traditional family values." And so say half the Cabinet and the Church of England — when they are not arguing that the Moonies should be prosecuted for the dishonest propaganda which corrupts their children.

In Haringey, the hostile campaign is led by Peter Murphy, councillor and Tory parliamentary candidate. He won his council seat in 1986. It was then that the White Hart Lane area of Tottenham, a white working-class community that had traditionally returned right-wing Labour representatives, went Tory in an unprecedented swing. It was largely on the issues of race and sex. Since his election, Murphy has not stopped seeking new ways to exploit the fear of lunatic leftists. "We are protesting against plans to introduce **HOMOSEXUAL EDUCATION** throughout Haringey schools" ran his first leaflet. He is doing it, he says, as a Christian who knows that God is against sodomy. Presumably his special relationship with the *Sun* is also in the name of God. Last month the *Sun*, having rung him to ask that he identify some photos that had come their way, provided him with early copies of the newspaper, revealing that Labour councillor Mandy Mudd had once been a

There is no rational debate to be had here. To a question about how a natural, God-given urge to heterosexuality could so easily be undermined by a teacher saying that homosexuality is acceptable, he responds: "I suggest you write an article portraying me as a right-wing fascist which is what you intended all along."

The question is in fact serious. Paul Johnson, Christian convert, says of homosexuality that "it's not a condition, it is something which is acquired by seduction in youth". Several in the Lords debate echoed this view. Why, then, do government ministers confine their children in the great public schools whose cloistered corners surely promote the acceptable pleasures of youthful homosexuality? Because the upper class view is that "it's only a phase", part of the education of Englishmen, which will be dropped when their public responsibilities become clear. They may endlessly reproduce its conditions in church, army, club, an array of all-male governing institutions (it is, of course *male* homosexuality which exercises the mind), but these are private institutions where discretion is built into the oak-panelling. Breaching those walls through open discussion in state schools, local councils, is to break the much older "unwritten agreement". A public debate on homosexuality makes the sexual behaviour of all publicly accountable; that is the threat.

Aids might seem to have given a basis for that fear. Aids, as the gay community first pointed out, can be checked by safer sexual and drug-taking practices. More likely, in its focus on male homosexuality, the actual fear is that men's natural biological urge is not to settle into monogamous families at all. Rather it is to go in search of sexual pleasure, with woman, man or beast. That is what male homosexuality represents; male sexual pleasure unrestrained by the little woman at home. *That* is the drive which can de-civilise society. Yet it is the ease with which the little woman at home can be ignored which our great institutions of social order — church, public schools, Conservative Party — do so much to reinforce.

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The burial of popular sovereignty

Ever since Bagehot the British peoples have been subjugated by a myth about the British constitution. Even the left has been fooled into accepting his Victorian analysis of the "dignified" and "efficient" parts of a constitution which has no room for democracy.

TOM NAIRN argues that only a modern republicanism – not a cranky concern with Princess Anne and Fergie, but a radical reforming spirit – can rescue the United Kingdom from the dead weight of its ancien regime

There has ever been a *structure* in English political society, every man has not walked by the light of his own eyes . . . the many have subordinated their judgement to that of a few – opinions have always settled down from the higher classes to the lower, and in that manner a decision that is really national has been formed . . .

Walter Bagehot

"The History of the Unreformed Parliament and Its Lessons", *National Review*, January 1860.

AFTER BEING DRIVEN from the throne our last Catholic monarch, King James VII and II, was rowed over the Thames on his way to exile. He had taken the Great Seal of England with him and threw it into the water in a fit of pique. But the symbol of Royal authority refused to vanish. It was dredged up in a fisherman's net off Lambeth Pier and returned to the new Protestant King amid cries of wonderment:

Heaven seemed by this accident to declare that the Laws, the constitution, and the sovereignty of Great Britain were not to depend on the frailty of man . . .⁽¹⁾

On that basis, William of Orange struck a deal with his parliaments in London and Edinburgh. What had been the Royal source of power ("Sovereignty") would henceforth essentially belong to the élite which had united to bring over the Prince of Orange, with certain reservations: the Crown rather than the People was to go on ruling, but "in Parliament".

Thus, the aristocracy and patrician class which was literally in parliament could do what it liked – in effect, it became a "collective Monarch", unbound by written rules or any competing focus of sovereign authority. It didn't need a constitution because it had *the* constitution: a mass of common-law judgments, rituals, time-honoured customs and sanctified procedures going back (many believed) well beyond Magna Carta, even to the Ancient Britons. This was the mythic "ancient

constitution" which God had smiled on and brought to final triumph through the events of 1688. These (shortly due for their 300th anniversary) established parliament's right to deploy that inheritance and – more significant in the long run – to decide what, in any particular case, it actually was and meant. This happily unconditional power is known in Britain as "the Supremacy of Parliament".

In language to which British political discourse is significantly immune, a brilliant *coup d'état* had set up a new state which pretended from Day One to be creakingly old. It's the state we still live under. While the supremacy of the "Crown-in-Parliament" is limited in all sorts of ways (as its defenders are always pointing out), the point is that it is *self-limiting*. An inherited historical wisdom is supposed to shape its decisions about itself, as about everything else. By 1689, we find this collective inward certainty of divine origins had settled down for good into the House of Commons: it had become "the Establishment". The phrase itself is a recent one, which seems to have gone round the world after being coined in the 1960s. But it denoted an 18th century reality. The reason it suddenly obtruded is merely that British intellectuals, traditionally integrated into the constitution as an upper-servant caste, began about that time to smell something rotten around the Palace and ask themselves if corpses might be buried under the floorboards.

Corpses under the floorboards

I ought to be frank about my own view here (eccentric, though less scorned than formerly): the inheritance consists almost entirely of corpses. Until recently these held up the old structure quite comfortably, but the really worrying developments have been since 1979. The success of Mrs Thatcher's adroit counter-revolution appears somehow to have thawed them out, bringing some symptoms of imminent collapse as well as the insufferable stink now conveyed by each day's newspapers and TV bulletins.

The thing which apologists focus on is, of course, the defeat of Royal (and crypto-Catholic) power. But there was a more important cadaver than that of dead Absolutism. In one of the few entertaining accounts of the period a subversive historian called Christopher Hill has pointed out that the real purpose was the premature burial of popular sovereignty. Irreparably traumatised by its Ugandan experiences of 1640-60 – warfare, regicide, massacre and military dictatorship – the ruling class erected a state with no house-room for democracy. "Democracy", that is, in the sense which was to be theorised in the Enlightenment and tested out by the American and French revolutions a century later. However defective in practice, these and the standard forms of modern polity derived from them rest on the principle of

popular sovereignty. The British constitution did not, and does not. As Hill puts it:

God had changed sides and was now overwhelmingly on the side of the Establishment, as he had previously been on the side of shocking innovation . . . The Glorious revolution was an additional providence . . . another reassertion of the predetermined social order. It confirmed England's historical right to rule the world. Farther confirmation



came from the industrial revolution, another unplanned gift from Heaven (and) a new ruling-class consensus formed: God = History = success = what happens. . . .⁽²⁾

The High Priest

Outside the United Kingdom it tends to be taken for granted that written words are the safeguard and defence of the poor, of minorities, workers and trade unionists. Just as undeniably, paper statutes and abstract principles may of course be ignored or trashed in practice. In fact, they regularly are so by most of the UK member states. The beadsmen and muezzins of our Old Régime love nothing so much as drooling over this fact. Ah, how futile are such fashionable paper toys, when compared with the solidity of customs in common — the “flexible” inherited software of fellows with government in their bone-marrow!

Not being a mere document, British constitutionalism has to be a way of life. It's an organic part of society. That's why it remains so confusing in comparative perspective. This “Constitution” is less the armature of an abstract state than a core of

national identity: not a charter but a family of role-models steadily *settling down* from all those fellows up above to constitute the national self-image. Like any family, it requires a head, or central unifying symbol. We know “who we are” in that important sense by reference to concrete persons, rather than to legal or philosophical concepts. Today these are primarily the persons of Queen Elizabeth II and her Royal and regularly increasing Family (in spite of Mrs Thatcher's own rising place in the charts).

As its origins in any case make clear, the British constitution is about monarchy, not democracy: “flexible”, trans-substantiated and disguised monarchy perhaps, but Royal Power nonetheless. Five minutes with almost any day's London papers will make this clear in one sense, of course: the House of Windsor is our daily media bread as well as the awesome institution of “Crown-in-Parliament”. Any encounter with a Régime Panjandrum or Druid, or perhaps with a Member of HM's Parliament, will underline the truth for you. Such bearers of the *Geist* invariably declare monarchy to be of no real importance whatever in today's Britain, most often with a gently deprecating smile. “In itself” (they say) the Crown is but a much-loved heirloom, a sentimental bond of appreciation for times past which helps bind things together, but — my goodness me! — could quite well be dispensed with if people were misled into wanting a greyer world. But would that really be *sensible*?

Whenever the word “sensible” shows up in the Queen's English, look out. God is at work again. It would take me too far off the track to try and analyse here the mechanisms of Freudian disavowal at work here: suffice it to say that the best way of protecting what's vital is often casual denial of its real importance. The “in itself” signals as much. In itself Royalty may indeed be little, but the real point is that in our Crown State it doesn't exist in itself at all: on the other hand, what it *means*, in a deeper or structural sense, is practically everything. Such meaning is implicitly acknowledged by the intense feeling it arouses and the taboo traditionally guarding it. A totem pole “in itself” is just a carved and painted tree-trunk; but in reality unacknowledged by philistine blatherings it is the regulator of tribal custom and propriety. The Christian cross and the Muslim crescent are “just symbols”; does it follow that nobody died for them, and that the Crusades or the Iranian Revolution were really for something else?

Being unwritten, the totemic system of British constitutionalism demands a special kind of justification. With often unconscious irony this is described as constitutional “lore”, and lore as distinct from mere science or law requires medicine men, transcribers or runes. The foremost of these is a Victorian gentleman called Walter Bagehot.

Bagehot was a banker and journalist of rural, small-town origins. He was not a politician, although he had once failed to become an MP, in a contest corrupt enough to require official investigation even amid the laxity of the 1860s. Neither was he an academic, although his book *The English Constitution* quickly became the main touchstone of all constitutional lore — a status it retains to this day, 127 years later. However, Bagehot compensated for these failings by being

The “awesome institution” of the Crown-in-Parliament is also our daily media bread: the royal family may be popular but the trappings (left, State Opening of Parliament) contradict the idea of democratic sovereignty

Camera Press

‘One of the most revealing aspects of post-1979 has been how our conquistadores of reaction have been able freely to employ weapons from the classical republican arsenal in their crusade. . . .’

one of the most sensible fellows who ever lived. Nothing could be more utterly appropriate to his dominant position in Britain's political culture. He founded the *Economist*, a businessman's weekly paper whose editorials have for nearly a century and a half been supreme embodiments of the sensible. This was well put by a Tory critic of Bagehot:

Bagehot . . . raised common sense to the power of genius. It is a comfortable and English thought. But if common sense is so raised, it ceased to be common sense; and this is exactly what happened with Bagehot . . . Common sense cannot bear such a weight and, in the process, what is commonsensical becomes nonsensical.⁽³⁾

Almost at once Bagehot became the British intellectual's alibi for refusing to think critically about either the monarchy or the constitution. The refusal has become chronic — bluffly British common nonsense as distinct from the brands of theoretical nonsense foreigners go in for. The last tome of Norman St John-Stevás's magisterial *Economist* edition of Bagehot is wholly devoted to admiring obituaries and Establishment hype from Gladstone up to Wilson and Macmillan, and among the worshippers we find (for example) the late Victorian constitutionalist, A. V. Dicey (whose *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution*, 1885, generally passes for authoritative). After a preposterous comparison between Bagehot and Alexis de Tocqueville he concludes fairly typically that

No author of modern times . . . has done so much to elucidate the intricate workings of English government. His *English Constitution* is so full of brightness, originality and wit, that few students notice how full it is also of knowledge, of wisdom and of insight . . . Bagehot was the first author who explained in accordance with actual fact the true nature of the Cabinet and its real relation to the Crown and to Parliament. He is in short one of these rare teachers who have explained intricate matters with such complete clearness, as to make the public forget that what is now so clear ever needed explanation.

Or — it remains only to add — will ever need real explanation (as distinct from amendment, or updating) again.

The English Constitution is in fact an astoundingly mediocre book: superficial, anecdotal, lacking in historical, sociological or legal perspective and (of course) profoundly complacent. It is also joyously conservative. One might expect so commanding a text to have at any rate the appearance of neutrality, a facade making it palatable to liberals and socialists. Not a bit of it. Bagehot wears his anti-reforming and coarsely elitist opinions openly on his lapel, and represents our constitution pretty well as what they hoped for back in 1688 — a providential instrument of class interest passing itself off as immemorial tradition.

Yet we find that in a 1967 centenary edition of it — the most interesting of postwar commentaries on the text — the socialist politician-intellectual Richard Crossman still conceded that *The English Constitution* was “the best introduction available” to these mysteries. He, too, tried only to update it, rather than consign it to the historical trashcan.

You would not be wrong in thinking there must be something fishy about all this. But just how high the odour is may be clearer if we first consider what Bagehot was telling modern Britain about its sacred totems.

Secrets of the Crown

We find the gist of his ideas implicit in those belligerently sensible judgments I mentioned earlier. They suggest that for all its ostentation and psychic popularity monarchy isn’t really important: Britain is *really* a republic — “a hidden Republic” was Bagehot’s own phrase — which has chosen the odd yet useful (or anyway harmless) disguise of Royalism — a deliberately retained vestment of colourful anachronism which all those in the know see through. See through, yet responsibly put up with for a variety of noble motives.

Bagehot argued this out as the celebrated distinction between “the dignified and the efficient parts of the Constitution” — the outward Royal or aristocratic theatre and the inward secret of efficient, modern, middle-class rule. “The characteristic merit of the Constitution,” he continued,

... is that its dignified parts are very complicated and somewhat imposing, very old and rather venerable; while its efficient part, at least when in great and critical action, is decidedly simple and rather modern. Its essence is strong with the strength of modern simplicity; its exterior is august with the Gothic grandeur of a more imposing age . . .

The point of the Gothic grandeur is to fool the masses. Bagehot insists heavily on this vital point. The key text of UK constitutional lore turns out to be a breviary of popular stupidity. Bagehot was forever preaching the merits of “deference”, and saw it as the crucial national characteristic both explaining and justifying such a constitution. The happy stupidity of England fortunately guarantees that responsible chaps — people “in the know” — can go on running things forever. Go on (that is) as long as irresponsibly abstract meddlers and damned foreign notions are kept out. To this ministering spirit of the lore of the *ancien régime*, democracy — men and women trying to walk by the light of their own eyes and exert authority from below — was the curse of modern times.

It’s worth recalling here that 1867 was also the year of Disraeli’s Second Reform Bill, which extended the franchise to certain parts of the lower-middle class. Bagehot opposed dangerous tinkering of this kind, convinced as he was that the “hidden republic” of the upper-middle classes had a duty to preserve English Civilization. Playing at reform for petty electoral advantage might quite needlessly disturb deference, and arouse Republicanism again — the spectre of Tom Paine and the Chartist demand for an un-hidden, straightforward republic with a written constitution and an aggressively republican, or formally egalitarian, spirit to back it up. Monarchy and a tight franchise were the great barrier against such disasters, to be maintained at all cost.

Monarchy and the House of Lords together —

the “theatrical part of the Constitution” — guard the core concerns of the elite (also describable as the National Interest) through different administrations and personalities:

The nation is divided into parties, but the Crown is of no party. Its apparent separation from business is that which removes it both from enmities and from desecration, which preserves its mystery, which enables it to combine the affection of conflicting parties — to be a visible symbol of unity to those so imperfectly educated as to need a symbol.

The symbol-addicted herd is best encouraged in the belief that Royalty still rules: the less they know about the hidden republic the better. The Queen on her Throne: that was “intelligible government” for clodhoppers like the simple labouring folk of his native county, Somerset.

Turning now to Bagehot’s “efficient part” of the constitution, here his point was that parliament’s evolution had — again fortunately — turned the constitution into something like a veiled and secretive elite tyranny:

The efficient secret of the English Constitution may be described as the close union, the nearly complete fusion, of the executive and legislative powers . . . The connecting link is *the Cabinet*.

It is this concentrated instrument of authority which had come to express the “despotic power” of the dominant class. Parliament’s absolute sovereignty was focused, concentrated through this single agency into an awesome instrument of real and virtually unhindered authority. “We have in England an elective first magistrate as truly as the Americans have an elective first magistrate. The Queen is only at the head of the dignified part of the Constitution. The Prime Minister is at the head of the efficient part” with his or her party committee, the cabinet.

Within the wider hegemonic elite there are bound to be different strategic views, organised as parties, and it may even matter who is “in” and who “out” at any given time. But a vital part of the “efficient secret” lies in keeping such oscillations “tolerable” (to the National Interest). As Harold Laski would put it later, a two-party system was ideal as long as there was really only one party — that of the overarching or national consensus. In constitution-lore (I should also explain) “consensus” is a standard ideological workmate of “sensible”: the siamese twins of “responsible public opinion” (for which one may also read “people like Walter Bagehot”). To work properly, such consensus has to express a viable identity — the people’s (deferential) idea of who they are and what “England” or “Britain” mean. And it is in the reproduction of this “national character” — as we would say today, “national identity” — that monarchy plays such a crucial rôle.

Thus the two elements of the constitution support and lead into one another, composing a kind of hierarchical palimpsest — the profoundly benevolent dictatorship of an enlightened few over the gratefully acquiescent multitude. As the same critic I quoted before (Henry Fairlie) has written of him, he was “the theorist of acquiescence”. Another commentator, C. H. Sisson, has shown how his message is always that we should put up with the way things are, for fear of worse (and especially of what “the inferior sort of people”

may do if they get out of hand):

His method was not to yield to reality but to be clever about it, and to ingratiate himself sufficiently to make sure that he was not left alone. There is an affable, matey tone about his work which has made thousands of mediocrities feel at home with him. . . .⁽⁴⁾

Linked to such mateyness, we should notice another notably English feature of Bagehotian culture — its unremitting concern with personal character. That is, with foibles and quirks as the true explanation of political activity. He wrote about the Establishment like the Victorian novelist Anthony Trollope. Since governmental matters are entirely in the hands of an omnipotently responsible élite, larger trends have (except for earthquakes and the British weather) little relevance. The people may be affected by them, but this doesn’t determine what is done, *that* is decided up above, on the basis of regular and concerned below-stairs visits. For such decisions, personality is crucial. In the world of chaps, all that counts is what sort of chap one (really) is. This is simply the reflection in Bagehot’s higher journalism of a state élite so secure at home and so thoroughly in charge of world history that only its internal conflicts mattered. Fairlie comments acutely: “This delight in political character is itself a form of the deference which Bagehot noticed in the English people. They enjoy a character at the head of their affairs, and they will enjoy even a failure if he has character enough.”

As a recognisable strain in British culture, this view of things is reproduced in most of today’s political commentary. The staple diet of the British political column is House of Commons “character” in just this sense: a thematic which in 1982-83, as Mrs Thatcher confronted Michael Foot, was to attain ecstasies unknown since the days of Disraeli versus Gladstone. Reading Bagehot’s essays (Fairlie concludes) “leaves one with an impression of levity” — the same levity found in most such columns, all racy concerned with personalised inside dope, and all taking “a sardonic but, on the whole, affectionate view of British political institutions”. Nothing has changed.

Sleepwalking opposition

But if all this is true, then how on earth is it that such gruesome ideas became so accepted, so much a part of Her Majesty’s common sense, that even radicals and socialists have come to live by them? Well, we find Crossman struggling with this paradox in his 1967 “Introduction”, and observing sadly that Tory apologists hadn’t had to foist the Bagehotian ideology upon the left: the “radicals” had been only too keen to fool themselves:

It was a long line of radical theorists and left-wing reformers who wilfully misunderstood the lessons of *The English Constitution*, seeing it not as a model of how to pry behind the facade and observe the technique of power, but as the classical account of how a British democracy does work and ought to work. . . .

Harold Laski and Herbert Morrison stand accused here by Crossman, but of course a multitude of parliamentarians, professorial apologists and columnar scribes have also earned seats in this capacious and multi-generational dock. Actually, Crossman deserves his place there, too.

How on earth could they imagine that a *demo-*

Public schoolboys, dressed up in symbols of a fake history, part of a conspiracy by the Southern-English ruling class, with its material basis in the drives of Southern capitalism



cracy "ought to work" in this fashion? The point was, surely, that Bagehot's analysis always seemed to be extendable to their own later needs and interests. If a hidden, middle-class republic had gained effective control of affairs by the 1860s, then why shouldn't a working-class republic follow in its wake? Why should it too not, in turn, win the absolute power of cabinet dominance – the untrammelled, sovereign authority symbolised by the Royal Mace on the House of Commons table – and put that dominance to its own purposes?

What opposition could ask for more than this total authority apparently bestowed by the combination of a deliberately unfair electoral system and a merely conventional constitution which parliament (ie, the cabinet and Prime Minister of the day) can "interpret" or remodel as they see fit?

This is why British Opposition too has always found reason for remaining "Her Majesty's" – for acquiescence in monarchy and the preservation of the merely external, "dignified" facade to which people have become so sentimentally and nationally attached. What motive can there ever be for needlessly offending such feelings and throwing away the valuable votes leading to such exalted power? Bagehotian in its essence, the modern British left doesn't need republicanism, a written constitution or a new mythology of popular sovereignty. It simply does not require the alternative national identity these would imply, because the old one will do perfectly well. Well, and indeed far better than those other inferior breeds infesting the UNO building: as I said, these are generally depicted by mouthpieces of the Old Regime as pitiable and over-formalised attempts to compensate for unruly National Characters less able than our own to accept the sage "settling down" of decisions from above.

Thus has it come about that a mediocre, smart-alec, bigoted snob of the 1860s said everything essential about our Crown and polity and laid the sensible foundations for reformers of all future ages to work within.

You will already have noticed the huge and greasy fly in this national ointment. If Bagehot was right, British socialism has nothing to worry about. If on the other hand he was wrong, then it's always been walking in its sleep – walking along, indeed, with a ring through its nose like the acquiescent morons so lovingly described in *The English Constitution*.

If the main elements of the "hidden republic" theory are sound, we progressives should all be in the Labour Party. If they aren't, then it's time we were republicans again: time – as a journalist of a very different kind, Neal Ascherson, has been patiently arguing in his Sunday *Observer* column – that we recognised there is not the remotest chance of either democratic or socialist advance within a state historically designed for deference, and a palaeo-constitution structured essentially for the exercise of quasi-Absolute power.

Hidden and open republics

Well, Bagehot was wrong. A new interpretation of these mysteries has just appeared which makes a significant break with the old sycophancy. It's called *The Noble Lie: the British Constitution and the Rule of Law*⁽⁵⁾ and the thesis is that rigor mortis finally set in some time between 1945 and the present: "Our constitution is not . . . a living one" (though it took Thatcherism to make the coroner's

verdict indisputable). This title suggests what Bagehot really was: a brilliant liar at the service of an historical confidence-trick.

The crux of his theory is a presentation of Royalty as a kind of justifiable opium of the Anglo-British masses. But what this glib notion omits is any recognition of the real, structural importance of such modes of identification in an age of nation-states and nationalism. Monarchy, the House of Lords and a good deal of what goes on in the House of Commons, are certainly theatrical show; however, "show" in this sense – spectacle, ideology, the concrete legitimization of belief – is no gilded accessory but part of the substance of modern societies. These, as distinct from the feudal or tribal social formations which preceded them, rest upon constituted national identities. Such constitution is inevitably a synthetic process – as Ernest Gellner argues in his *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), modern social and economic development has pushed peoples into trying to become nations, and in that effort practically any cultural invention may be attempted and (still more surprising) be realised. The resultant state structures both pre-suppose and demand a minimal community of social culture and language, expressed as allegiance – a sense or primary belonging to a given national community.

Bagehot depicted this fact in typically stereotyped fashion as the notion of English "National Character". But national identity is a different concept altogether. "Identities" in the relevant sense are a cultural construction employing (mainly) the raw materials of heredity and the debris of past history and popular tradition – they are by definition "invented traditions", often of a very complex kind, ideologies elaborated to help modernise societies or (occasionally, as in the British case) to slow down, contain or castrate modernisation. What makes an "ideology" is the semblance of naturalness in which these inventions invariably clothe themselves. It's worth noticing here that *The English Constitution* itself may be seen as an especially blatant, yet unrecognised, specimen of just such inventiveness: more exactly, the adroit re-establishment as "Nature" of an authority structure threatened by subversion from below. Few other myths of national identity have proved so successful or been better camouflaged in persiflage and anecdote.

When perceived in this light, Bagehot's "common sense" contrast of dignified semblance and efficient reality appears altered. The Royal symbolism so prominent in the vestments of the Anglo-British state, in its constitutional impedimenta of Crown-in-Parliament, Woolsack and Royal Assent, and in the day-to-day life of civil society (where private dreams mingle with the public trance of State Occasions) is clearly central to national-popular identity. It has the double peculiarity of being more like an opiate and less like a variety of "nationalism" than its corollaries in other lands. Yet it is not necessarily more of a deplorable drug than other national emblems. Her Majesty's subjects do dwell in a singularly ornate *société du spectacle*; yet all modern societies involve spectacle or cultural symbolism, and it's not this fact itself which should be deprecated.

There was in fact very little either old or venerable about the outward show of British monarchy in 1867. What facade there was was clearly fake-old, a fictitious immemorialism con-



The British polity has not changed since 1688 – "a booming and cosmopolitan City (above, the Lord Mayor's Banquet) allied to Europe's largest concentration of millionaire farmers, supported by a rapacious and politically spineless middle class"

trived to create a sense of continuity and pastness in the dimension where Anglo-British statehood was at its weakest. Its early-modern history was a tale of regicide, premature and bellicose republicanism, of broken and evicted dynasties and their pitiable replacements from Hanover and Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. Even in the 1860s, after twenty years of Victoria and her Consort, the Royal fabric was more novel and more precarious than people later imagined. The years from 1867 to the second edition of 1872, when *The English Constitution* established its initial influence, were also those of a distinct revival of interest in republicanism. Bagehot's book was intended to suppress this tendency as well as to combat specific plans for reforming this franchise.

On the other hand, if the Royal facade wasn't really old, the efficient "hidden republic" of British affairs wasn't really modern. "Decidedly simple and rather modern": here is the key image which has reassured the British left and kept it sleepwalking on the old treadmill for so long. The trouble is that it was mistaken when Bagehot wrote, and the fact that socialism decided to become "British" with its help has not made it right.

In truth, that part was (and remains today) the genuine if robust anachronism of the British constitutional code. It went right back to that order's elite origins in the Revolution of 1688, and was established as a fully operational system during the long era of Walpole's Whig hegemony in the earlier 18th century: England's formative "banana republic" period, as E.P. Thompson (another subversive) described it in *Whigs and Hunters*. It had therefore long preceded the relatively recent apotheosis of monarchy and Royal glamour in British affairs – a characteristically crude (or "simple") early-modern device of oligarchic government which has incongruously survived through and beyond the whole intervening age of democratic revolutions and nationalism. Survived – and ended up as an incomparable weapon of counter-revolution.

Now, Bagehot pretended that this mode of rule had evolved significantly to allow what he called "the middle classes" their share of authority – an idea crucial to the "hidden republic" delusion. Yet there was no "middle-class" takeover in Britain in the sense required by the theory of an indefinitely flexible unwritten constitution. Because there was no such change then, there is extremely unlikely to be one now: that "next stage" of socialist transformation upon which left-wing acquiescence in Bagehotism has always counted.

To assert this invites an obvious rebuttal. If the Old State allows no real change, then how about all the great social and cultural transformations which have irrefutably occurred – those "social revolutions" which Régime-speak is always suspiciously anxious to mention, "since 1945", "since the sixties" and (nowadays, with mounting confidence) "since 1979"? Is one not forced to fall back on some kind of corny conspiracy theory, by depicting the History of British Liberty as no more than a story of evolving elite tyranny?

However, I see no reason to lapse into eccentricity or simple-mindedness over such dilemmas. The point is that the continuous "conspiracy" of the British constitution has at bottom been the (mainly) Southern-English ruling class, and its unquenchable material basis in the commercial or "outward-looking" structure and drives of southern capitalism. We are talking only about what Edmund Burke, that class's principal apologist – the organ-grinder to Bagehot's monkey – reverentially described as "a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection":

As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born. Each contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primaevial contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher natures.

The purpose of this cosmic elitism is to ordain ("in the eternal constitution of things") that "men of intemperate minds cannot be free". Destiny meant them to be run by chaps trained up in the fixed contract or partnership: society's officer corps, where the right mix of breeding and capital has been given Public Schooling and put in charge of Westminster's Collective Monarch and the City-Treasury nexus.

Frankly, there seems to me no mystery or doubt about this "conspiracy's" continuity or success. And none either about Bagehot's part in its reproduction after the 1870s. "Conspiracy" may seem to imply that he was a conscious tool of the ongoing English contract and its ruling clique, re-forging Burkean ideology to face new challenges. Well yes: but that is exactly what he was – in background, personality, and achievement.

He did not represent "the middle classes" in that broad, ideologically useful sense which governs British historical retrospect: the eternally "rising" class which somehow never seems to have got anywhere (until 1979, that is). Indeed, there are few commentators who can be more precisely located in terms of "interest". He was (literally) born in a bank and became a life-long creature of the City. Professionally he moved from managing a London bank to being editor of the City's main organ, the *Economist*.

After *The English Constitution*, he was to produce a more substantial, but less well-known work, *Lombard Street* – an analysis of London's mid-century financial system as it approached its period of maximum world power. Anyone who develops a serious interest in these matters should study this book. It dealt with the economic underpinning of the Royal constitution in what he called "the monarchical form of Lombard Street", England's single-reserve, Bank of England system. This explained the City's centrality at that time to world capitalism, and why "in consequence London is full of money, and all continental cities are empty compared with it". Concluding the argument, Bagehot observed how

You might as well, or better, try to alter the English Monarchy and substitute a Republic, as to alter the present constitution of the English money-market, founded on the bank of England. . . There is no force to be found adequate to so vast a reconstruction and so vast a destruction, and therefore it is useless proposing them. . .

What Bagehot stood for, then, was for the part of bourgeois opinion which had then and has now by far the most marked influence on British governments, and the strongest motive for thinking itself in control. But his self-congratulatory myth could also be read as flattering to the provincial manufacturing middle class that has both "risen" and fallen down again in disgrace since *The English Constitution* appeared. That class too read the *Economist* and aspired (though even then tamely) to a greater say in affairs of state and empire. "Middle class" is an ideological label confusing these two fractions of the British bourgeoisie: its old, southern mercantile elite, locked into state power and the social hegemony of aristocracy and Court, and its new and politically supine northern industrialists, mistakenly convinced that gradual reform would bring them the sort of new state needed by native industry and technology. The desperate political nullity of the latter was (admittedly) not yet fully defined in Bagehot's day. It would not be fully revealed (one is tempted to say) until the establishment of the Confederation of British Industry in 1965 – only then (in a phrase of Ascherson's) were the "regimental mascot sheep" of British capital put fully on display.

As for the other accusation – of ignoring "social revolutions" – while the republican view has no difficulty in admitting such mutations, all it insists upon is the limited effect these have so far had upon the enduring structures of either British authority or British wealth. Before the steam-engine, the Great British polity rested upon an unsavoury power-bloc of mercantile capitalism and efficient big-estate agriculture. The vast social transformation linked to steam power, known in British folklore as "the Industrial Revolution", has now practically vanished into the nostalgia of 1980s's steam-railway enthusiasts. Yet that polity and its main social supports remain recognisably the same: a booming and cosmopolitan City allied to Europe's largest concentration of millionaire farmers, supported by an increasingly rapacious and politically spineless middle class and a subservient urban peasantry.

It even looks the same: the old Hanoverian style has been replicated in the upper reaches by architect Quinlan Terry and Bankers' Georgian,

while Prince Charles's anti-modern taste will shortly be bestowed upon deserving estate-workers as "community architecture". As for the state, the historian Joanna Innes has recently described in *Past & Present* how "both domestic and foreign observers were well aware (that) England had in a certain sense one of the most 'absolute' of 18th century governments". In 1987, who is unaware of just how concentrated, secretive, ruthless and generally "absolute" UK government has again become?

Crossman showed how, far from "broadening out" democratically over time to embrace the forces of social change, the constitution has tended consistently to narrow. Threats and moments of tension make it retract towards its absolutist origins – its "first principles" in Machiavelli's sense. He was making use here of a significant re-analysis of government by a Scottish political scientist and politician, the late John Mackintosh (*The British Cabinet*, 1962). Mackintosh demonstrated that, since Churchill's time, Cabinet rule has turned into Prime Ministerial rule – a revived Divine Right potentially more dangerous than the original because legitimated by forms of election.

Crossman illustrated this thesis with a description of how, in 1956, Lord Avon handled the Suez crisis and ran a war without Cabinet consultation, helped only by "a handful of colleagues and advisers". "Simple . . . at least when in great and critical action" was Bagehot's descriptive formula for this crude old anti-democratic machinery: yes indeed, and we have no excuse today for not knowing, having seen the whole system in operation again (from parliamentary outrage to torpedo-tubes) in the "critical action" of the South Atlantic five-years ago.

Anyone doing another edition of *The English Constitution* today would be able to illustrate the system's deep grammar with innumerable examples of intensifying autocracy, centralisation and obsessive secrecy: the true, original stigmata of a state returning in decline to its first principles.

Escaping from Bagehot

How on earth can we get rid of all this? The difficulty about any new version of republicanism is simply the extent of that question – as if someone equipped with a small wheelbarrow were quietly to propose moving Ben Nevis to another location. I'm using the term here to mean not a cranky and querulous feud with the personal or the costs of the Windsor household, but a rejection of what monarchy *means* in the authority or Crown-in-Parliament sense: not a critique of the totem-pole, but of what it connotes as a regulator of pseudo-ethnic identity – as an eccentric form of nationalist ideology.

As we saw, constitution lore is in Britain so intertwined with other institutions, with traditions and social customs, that it's difficult (and in an immediate sense rather unconvincing) to isolate it like this – indeed, I feel rather guilty at not having had space to show just how difficult.

But great as the difficulties are, I see no alternative to saying that (again using Ascherson's terms) some kind of "republican revolution" into modernity has become a pre-condition for seriously or consistently opposing what Bagehot's constitution has turned into. It's only a precondition, naturally. Those addicted to "class" and to the range of "substantive issues" which Regal

Constitutionalism presses upon sensible reformers will, of course, object that such formal changes and paper principles change nothing "in themselves". Well, no. But it's just that such changes have become a necessary condition of altering anything else at all. With a parliament where in 1987 not enough opposition deputies would turn up to keep alive and re-present a new Bill of Rights, there can be no point in pretending optimism on these issues. The Labour Party has been unable to democratise itself, never mind the *ancien régime*.

One of the most revealing aspects of post-1979 has been how our *conquistadores* of reaction have been able freely to employ weapons from the classical republican arsenal in their crusade – able sometimes, indeed to "impose democracy" in the name of popular liberties upon a Labour movement still fossilised in the mould of a dead consensus. Historically forgotten and despised by the Regime-left, republicanism could now only return in this way, as a disfigured right-wing travesty of itself.

As for the "hidden republic" the subtle blend of truth and lie in Bagehot's concept also becomes clearer in this longer republican view. While there was certainly (and still is) a "hidden republic" at work this wasn't (and is not) a republic in the *modern sense* – that is, the sense of entailing popular sovereignty or mass participation. It is best understood as an old-bourgeois or oligarchic phenomenon pre-dating political modernity. Although it helped powerfully to form that modernity, it has never itself been part of it: the fundamental strategy of its statehood has been preservation of the early-modern – of what is really a kind of outward-looking, city-state patriciate rather than the typical class structure of an industrialised nation-state (which Karl Marx wrongly believed to be in formation here).

There was never a modern republic; and never (therefore) a modern socialism either. Industrialism and its new middle class had only a passing impact upon the old state; so, in turn, did the industrial working class. And the back of both may now have been permanently broken by a de-industrialisation perfectly compatible with – and in some ways actually demanded by – the constitution and newer evolution of the mercantile political economy which it expresses.

If that's so, can there be any way of getting rid of Bagehot and all he stands for? Will people still be up-dating him well into the next millennium? If we can't get him off our backs by constitutional revolution, is there any hope that Europe will help us out – that (in effect) some kind of ultra-Europeanist strategy could become a substitute for "republicanism" in the sense I've indicated? I don't know, and must leave you with a host of awkward questions. □

1. Stuart Prall, *The Bloodless Revolution: England 1688* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp.239-40.
2. Christopher Hill, "God and the English Revolution". *History Workshop Journal*, Spring 1984.
3. Henry Fairlie, "Walter Bagehot: on the Political Journalist as Entertainer," *Encounter*, March 1971.
4. C.H. Sisson, *The Case of Walter Bagehot* (1972).
5. By Ian Harden and Norman Lewis, Hutchinson 1986.

Tom Nairn's forthcoming book, *The Enchanted Glass – Britain and its Monarchy*, will be published by Radius on 28 May, £8.95 (pb).

WHEN NEIL Kinnock came back from Israel last month, he was interviewed on Radio Four and trod an accurate line between progressive Jewish and progressive Arab opinion. All well and good. Then he was asked about the fuss over the Red Cross's red cross, allegedly used on Labour's "Make Budget Day NHS Day" badges. His answer must have reduced thousands to despair. It doesn't matter what it was: it was correct; it was long; it was boring; it took the threat of legal action seriously. Above all, it was defensive.

Many otherwise good Kinnockites must have thought: "He's not leading the party anywhere; he hasn't got it in him to inspire the millions of voters that Labour needs to win over."

That, however, was last month. Since then, I have had the chance to hear at first hand what those who didn't vote Labour last year think of the Labour leader. And my faith has been restored.

It happened like this. As part of the research for a book, last week I commissioned two group discussions with working-class former Labour voters in Roehampton, south London. Most of the discussion was not about party politics, but they were asked what they thought of the parties and their leaders. Their answers were surprising. Asked what she thought of Labour politicians, a woman who hadn't voted Labour since 1966 said: "Apart from Neil Kinnock, who obviously has got his heart in the right place, I don't think there's anybody else. I think he's a reasonably good bloke, but I don't think he's strong enough."

This prompted an SDP voter to say: "I quite like Kinnock, actually. In some ways he's a bit of a comic figure, perhaps because I watch things like *Spitting Image* too much. He's not like the politicians of the old days that seem to command respect, like Churchill. But I think that he could probably be quite good." The first woman agreed: "I think he could be quite good if he had plenty of strong people around him."

A nursery school worker, who had just been complaining that she didn't vote Labour because the party was so divided, said: "He's done quite well to survive, hasn't he? Considering all the knocks he's taken from the left. I think he's tried to come over quite strong. And he is sincere." Kinnock's sincerity was unanimously agreed by this group of five Conservative and three Alliance voters, most of whom read the *Mail* or the *Sun*.

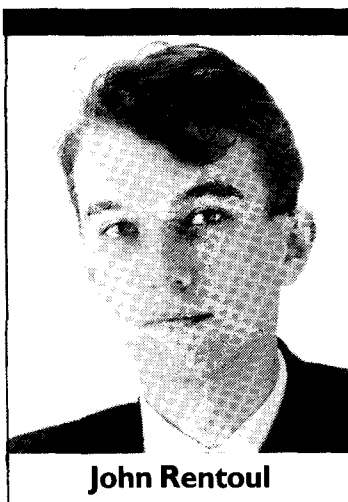
The separate group of men were more aggressively Tory, and included only one Alliance voter. But some of them, too, stood up for Kinnock. The Alliance voter said: "I think Kinnock's got quite a good image. Nice, clean-cut family man. He does seem genuine." A Conservative disagreed: "I think he's weak."

"Well, I like him," said another Conservative, who last voted Labour in 1979. "I think he's pretty honest. He's a pretty powerful speaker. I think he's got a lot of good ideas as well, but with all the rubbish he's got in that party, he's never going to get anywhere. I don't think he'll ever make a leader — he'll never get the chance."

CERTAINLY, these feelings towards Kinnock come a little way down the scale from outright adulation. He is not hero-worshipped by ex-Labour voters. But there was a warmth there that I was not expecting. I was also not expecting the contrasting chill which afflicted opinions of Margaret Thatcher. I had thought that Conservative converts idolised her, that her personality, was often the reason given for changing party loyalty.

But no. One woman offered: "She's very

STATE OF THE NATION



John Rentoul

Kinnock fan club lapses

strong." There was a silence. "We wouldn't like to say what we really think of her," said a woman who switched to the Tories in 1983. "If you ask the average person, nobody likes her. I think it's probably her style, the way she talks."

"She seems to be a law unto herself," said another Tory. "She never answers a question," added an SDP voter.

"She never says yes or no," agreed the 1983 Tory. "She just twists it round. She's very clever the way she talks." Only one kept the true Thatcherite faith: "She's another Elizabeth the First."

The men had less to say. The Alliance voter thought she was "terribly false"; the others thought she was "very hard", "tough and motivated" or "the hard person this country needed".

These comments put flesh on the bones of opinion poll findings that Kinnock scores highly on "caring" but not "decisiveness" and Thatcher vice versa. So there is potential for ex-Labour voters to be attracted to Kinnock — although not perhaps his party — and repelled by Thatcher. And, in talking about the Conservatives, it became obvious that discontent over the NHS, education and the poll tax was considerable and could provide further reasons for "redefecting".

The nursery school worker was changing her mind. "I would have said that the Conservatives were a more united party. But I think that now they have been in power so long they are not quite so united. To be perfectly honest, I voted for her, but if I'd have realised what she was going to do . . . I cannot believe what she's going to do on education, it's appalling. ILEA's going, she's abolishing it. So where does that leave the children? I mean, what about if people can't afford to pay?"

This unleashed a torrent of complaints. "There are certain things about the Conservat-

ive Party that I like, and certain things that frighten the life out of me, that make me think 'My God, what next?' The poll tax sounds horrific to me," said one. "If there are more people in your family, you're poorer, because you've got to pay more," said another. "And she keeps putting prescriptions up and up. They've gone up again, haven't they?" An SDP voter agreed: "The National Health Service: she doesn't seem to care about that, does she?"

Nor is the Alliance currently a credible stopping-off point for disaffected Tories. On the evidence of these groups, it has more serious problems than might have been thought. The men were dismissive. "It's just a joke." Even the Alliance voter said: "I don't know which is which. It's a shame, really." The women were equally unimpressed. "They can't make up their minds." "A fiasco at the election." "They've got a lot to do to get organised." A school meals supervisor forgot that she'd said she had voted SDP and reverted to her Labour loyalty. Another SDP voter said: "I felt after having voted SDP it was a wasted vote. I can quite understand people that don't vote, because they don't necessarily agree with any of them. I know a lot of people think they're being apathetic, but I can understand how they feel."

OF COURSE, small group discussions are not representative. If one person in a group of eight says they would rather go ice-skating than go to church (as one did last week), it doesn't mean that 12.5 per cent of the population prefer the rink to the Book of Common Prayer. But group discussions can tell you a lot about the typical attitudes that lie concealed behind opinion poll findings — such as the fact that 86 per cent say they don't go to church regularly.

Political opinion polls are confusing at the moment. Harris Research last week produced a figure of 43 per cent supporting Labour (another post-SDP-breakaway record) and then on Sunday the same organisation, using the same methods, put Labour at 36 per cent in its poll for the *Observer*. "It's within sampling error," says Harris's Bob Waller gamely. Well, at plus or minus 3 points, not quite. But, taking the average of both Harris polls and the MORI poll for the *Sunday Times*, Labour is at 39 per cent, the same as last month's average, seven points behind the Tory average of 46 per cent.

This is not as bad as some people like to make out, given that the economy is rattling ahead at an embarrassing pace, and the Alliance vote has collapsed. But "if there were a general election tomorrow, who would you vote for?" is still a silly question, less than a year after the last one, while bits of the Alliance are relaunching more frequently than most newspapers and while Labour's policy review is still reviewing.

That's why the views of randomly-selected skilled manual and clerical workers of the kind that Labour needs to win over are worth investigating in more depth. And their views are why I've rejoined the Kinnock fan club. Labour's problem is not its leader. It is the party. If the leader is at fault it is because his vigorous attacks on the undemocratic hard left have helped to create the image of a sincere person leading an irredeemable party. Kinnock's willingness to condemn an undemocratic minority in the party needs to be balanced by his sincere praise for the attractive, effective and united majority.

The French left says 'uncle'

DAVID S. BELL *analyses the ideological shifts behind Mitterrand's non-campaign for re-election*

THE FRENCH PUBLIC is currently in the grip of "uncle mania" and looks set to re-elect "uncle" (*tonton*) Mitterrand as President for a second seven-year term on 8 May. Nobody would have predicted a second coming for Mitterrand in 1986 when the Socialists lost a majority in the National Assembly and the President was forced to accept the radical programme of the right-wing Prime Minister Jacques Chirac. Mitterrand has only the power to advise, to encourage and to warn, but is the firm favourite.

Mitterrand has the complete support of the Socialist Party but the irony is that the party has followed the line mapped out by his rival and ideological opponent Michael Rocard, planning then agriculture minister in the last Socialist government. Throughout the 1970s Rocard

preached a form of market-oriented and consensual social democracy and this culminated in a bitter struggle at the 1979 Metz Socialist Party Congress when Rocard's supporters were seen off and the party then drew up a *Project* inspired by the state-socialist left (including a list of nationalisations). The party's success in government as a moderate force and the need to win over the floating voter has pushed it onto the ground formerly occupied by Rocard. Rocard has always stressed the importance of the market as a generator of wealth and been sceptical about state-bureaucratic solutions to industrial problems.

Mitterrand is, however, 71 and his new-found popularity has not made him declare his candidature for the presidential elections and he will not do so until mid-March (the first ballot is on 24 April and the second on 8 May).

Mitterrand's on-again-off-again-begin-again-Finnegan marvellously wrong-foots the right, who find it easy to attack the Socialist candidate and very difficult to attack the President. But it causes

difficulties for his own supporters. Mitterrand's strategy at this juncture is like a slow bicycle race: to go as slowly as possible without falling over. The Socialists will do what Mitterrand wants. In the party it all depends on what the man from Del Monte says. The Socialist Party has, however, several advantages in addition to being the president's party and dominating the Left. It is by far the most popular political party in France despite the flurry of recent scandals about Party finance. These scandals may have been raked up precisely to undermine this popularity but, after damage limitation by the President, mud-slinging has worked only to increase public scepticism about politicians in general. Also a major asset is the popularity of the party's leaders, all of whom emerged from government with enhanced reputations. As long as Socialist barons can be made to work together the party will benefit. Unity on the left is at a premium; its secret weapon against a right which has a month or so to dissipate its majority by quarrelling.

Dogs and lamp-posts

Rocard has been a potential difficulty because he has been presidential hopeful since 1979 (and has a stranglehold on the nation's affections) but he will have to stand down when Mitterrand declares. There has been speculation about a deal between the two but Mitterrand's position in the party is so strong that a Rocard challenge would be suicidal and for Mitterrand to offer Rocard a *douceur* after the election would be unnecessary. In politics never get between a dog and a lamp-post. Yet Rocard's mission to bring to the party a socialism based on values and goals — justice, equality and community — rather than public ownership or a socialist mode of production has been a success. Rocard's libertarian socialism emphasised freedom and spontaneity and stressed the humanitarian rather than the organisational, as well as the importance of persuasion rather than the "break with capitalism". Rocard's self-management approach was intended to build socialism up from civil society not down from the state and he contemptuously vilified the metaphor of revolution which the party then used — even Mitterrand is now among those who favour "keeping the state within bounds." Statism has collapsed but although the Socialist Party manifesto ratified by the convention of mid-January is largely inspired by Rocard's methods it is difficult to give content to the new non-centralist vision of society.

The party still has a left but the Heavy Metal version is no more. Jean-Pierre Chevènement, who went through the 1970s like Che Guevara on speed, was changed into a moderate figure by a stint as education minister. Chevènement, who leads a group called Socialism and Republic, took on the task of preaching "Republican discipline" and the virtues of traditional education whilst at Education and converted some years ago to an enthusiasm for Europe-wide action to stimulate the economy. An old fashioned marxist Jean Poperen, who rushes in where Engels feared to tread and who was sacked as second-in-command

"J'aime tonton" — I love-uncle-
Mitterrand shirts enter the
election campaign



Regain/Gamma

to First Secretary Lionel Jospin, has since the autumn led the headbangers in a free floating controversy over whether the President should be obliged to dissolve the Assembly if he is re-elected on 8 May. But, although the Socialists are the most popular single party, the various right-wing parties would most likely win a combined majority in the Assembly. The proposal was decisively rejected by the party.

As a measure of the change of party thinking to Rocard's realistic approach there is the section from the Socialist manifesto for the presidential elections on nationalisation. The party feels, unlike the 1970s, that public industry is not the main means of orienting and stimulating industrial activity but simply one instrument among many for dealing with capitalist mess. As a concession to the left it is stated that none of the recent privatisations is irreversible and only one re-nationalisation is promised (the television station TF1).

The nationalisations of the 1981 Socialist government were all of industries which were either badly run by private management or effectively bankrupt. The Socialist government was obliged to restructure these industries, rationalise production and invest in new plant to make them efficient. Despite the painful process — particularly in the steel industry — they were showing an overall profit by the time of the 1986 elections and, to general surprise, the Socialists gained popularity from this demonstration of administrative competence.

Although a *minceur* masterpiece there are several proposals of substance and clear priorities in the Socialist platform, whilst it underlines that times are hard, that business must be competitive and there will be no Socialist Epiphany on 8 May. It is stressed that a minimum income should be guaranteed. The party hopes to establish a minimum of 2,000 Francs (about £50 a week) per month for the least well-off costing the exchequer £1 billion per year (but locally administered). The counterpart is that the recipients will have to enter a public works programme. This is at some distance from the 1970s pledge to raise the minimum wage (which now stands at 3,905 Francs — about £100 per week per month). The new approach is to construct a safety net for all citizens rather than to rely on the knock-on consequences of the minimum wage rate. The convention to draw up the manifesto in January decided that it could not commit itself to maintaining the purchasing power of wages (although this "remains a long-term objective") and the reduction in the working week will only take place with a corresponding reduction in salary (unlike the 1970s view, and very Rocardian). There is also a costly plan for the renovation of public housing.

Education, the area in which bungling caused the fall of the 1984 Socialist government, is made a priority. Among other things the Socialists want to get four-fifths of school leavers up to "A level" standard by the year 2000, introduce the teaching of a second language into all primary schools, to double the number of university students and triple the number of grants over the same period. These proposals include a commitment to increase the research and development budget to 3 per cent of national income by 1992.

Europe, itself an old Socialist favourite, gets attention (there is a proposal to make a European

head "as legitimate as a head of state") but the emphasis on military co-operation and European weapons procurement as well as the need for more vigilance in the East-West balance are more recent amours.

The platform, accepted by a 90 per cent vote, with possibly about half the activists actually voting, was passed unanimously after amendment. Harmony, reconciliation, cohesion and the transcendence of age-old divisions were stated objectives (Rocard's "dynamic compromise") and the manifesto obeys the Rocardian injunction that if you have scarce resources they should go on education and welfare...

Objectively laughable

Meanwhile on the extreme left never has anybody been so much at sea since Columbus. For the Communists the 1980s has been a series of surprise packages each more startlingly horrible than the last and they are now at only 4 per cent in the opinion polls — not much to bargain with, when the Socialists need Communist votes on the second ballot. The party's retreat into sectarianism has shown how to lose friends and alienate people and its line that everything since 1982 shows that the right and the Socialists are "objectively" the same is risible. Unlike the Socialists, Communist leaders are unpopular and those with appeal (like the former ministers) have been sidelined. The Communist presidential candidate Lajoinie has been running hard since May but is like a general who finds that his army has gone off and left no forwarding address.

But there's more. The Communist electorate is under threat from the dissident so-called "Communist renovator" candidate, Pierre Juquin. Juquin has spent the last 33 years in the Communist Party but, like the proverbial piano player in the brothel, has only just discovered what has been going on. (He refused to support Lajoinie and was expelled.) His "rainbow coalition" proposes a mixture of unilateral nuclear disarmament, a referendum on nuclear power issues, anti-racist laws, independence for New Caledonia, and ecological measures. Juquin has declared his intention to support Mitterrand on the second ballot.

Leaving aside the red yawn to the left, the Socialist task is to woo the centre and they have yet to find the trick of being convincing as well as attractive. They have to hold out hope without being demagogic. The manifesto as outlined leaves Mitterrand with a free hand but does not raise the temperature — the ecstasy rate is very low. The Socialist bet is that "uncle" Mitterrand will pull the party up much in the way an adult gives a hand to the child in the campaign poster. However the winning of a parliamentary majority will only be accomplished through hard work, attention to detail, and a balanced programme. The party will have to respond to questions about how to increase wealth by production — rather than to concentrate on distribution — to which Rocard was offering answers in the 1970s. Rocard is, in the current idiom, "out of the loop" but the Party's strategy gives Rocard a (politically) posthumous victory. □

David S. Bell is the author (with B. Criddle) of The French Socialist Party, the second edition of which has just been issued in paperback by Oxford University Press.

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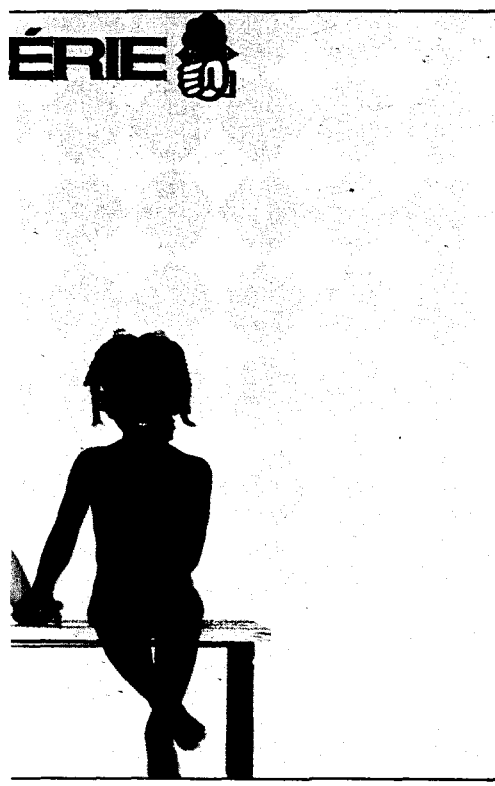
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Naked appeal



'Nakedness disguises class but emphasises race and gender, two issues central to any modern sense of politics. . . The medium is the message: political advertising will always tell us more about advertising than it does about politics'

THE FRENCH Socialist Party has launched its presidential election campaign with an attempt to embody photographically the three ideals of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. This has turned out to involve quite a lot of nudity since, as the campaign's designer Sylvin Mathieu explains, nudes are the "purest" expression of these ideals. To put it another way, if you remove someone's clothes you can't see what class they belong to.

This nakedness has caused quite a sensation in France, including in the party, but Mathieu insists that the posters are not intended to shock. They didn't want any chi-chi, he said, just "the message and nothing but the message". But the messages of nakedness are varied. Nakedness disguises class but it emphasises race and gender, two issues which are central to any modern sense of politics.

Just how far this visual vocabulary is from being "abstract", as it was described by Socialist First Secretary Lionel Jospin, can be seen by shifting the units around a bit in your head to see the combinations the designers avoided. A naked pregnant black woman? Could be a refugee. A man sitting with a rose in his lap? Too effeminate, he could be homosexual. A woman sprinting along with the socialist rose as a relay torch? A bit threatening, she could be a virago. The presence of one black model among five could just as soon be seen as problematic tokenism as utopian integration, and what to Sylvin Mathieu is a simply celebratory picture of pregnancy is to me the boring cosmeticisation of yet another area of women's lives. If I were French would it alter the way I voted? Not if French election campaigns

work anything like British ones . . .

Since 1979 and Saatchi's campaign to sell Thatcher to the country, Britain has considered itself politically media aware. In blind opposition to the facts it has become a political truism that selling yourself hard will win you votes. Labour's most recent campaign was considered by many to be a resounding success. After one particular broadcast Kinnock allegedly rose 16 points in the ratings (more of an argument against polls than in favour of media coverage) and on 12 June in *Campaign*, a newspaper for the advertising industry, John Hegarty of Bartle Bogle Hegarty declared "Labour has won the advertising election". That statement sums up the link between advertising profile and electoral result: there isn't one. In Britain Labour's photographers set up pseudo-social-realist shots for the posters, in France they set up pseudo-Olympian ones; both tasks are equally politically irrelevant.

The most important point about the growth of advertising in politics is that it testifies to capitalism's wondrously self-sealing nature. Every political party must now submit its ideals and policies at election time to a whacky process of encoding and mystification. Liberty — naked pregnant women with the wind in their hair. Socialism — miraculous bowls of roses that glow in the dark (a motif from Labour's most recent campaign). All elections are now fought on capitalism's home ground. In the face of this, it is a sideline to interpret specific campaigns. The medium is the message: political advertising will always tell us more about advertising than it does about politics.

Hilary Bichovsky-Little

The Armenian twist to *perestroika*

Gorbachev's Armenian troubles aren't a test of the "limits" of the Soviet reforms, but are in fact a product of their contradictory dynamics. ANTHONY BARNETT reports on an unravelling strand of perestroika

THE MASS DEMONSTRATIONS in the Armenian capital of Yerevan call for a new variation in *perestroika*: the reconstruction of a Republic's borders within the Soviet Union. But the scene is familiar. From the Sudetenland to the Falklands, from Ireland to the Punjab, from Cambodia to Transylvania, across the years and the continents, borders delineated in the wake of multi-national empires have come to be contested in the age of "the people". Within Azerbaijan the response to Armenian demands is also familiar: sectarian assaults in which blood mingles with religion.

Although facts are scarce, some passions are predictable — just as Sikh extremism in India has been encouraged by activists in Britain, Muslim violence near Baku may have been inspired from Iran, the home of more than half the ten million Azerbaijanis (or Azeris) who live to the south-west of the Caspian Sea. This is not to suggest that "outside agitators" are responsible. On the contrary, the very notoriety of "alien" influence everywhere means a social force indigenous to the planet in our century is hard at work. Each nationalism proclaims its uniqueness with all the intensity it can muster. But all are related variations on common themes of identity and development.

Internationally, however, the particular grievance that has provoked the crisis by the Caspian was not expected. Even David Downing's invaluable *Atlas of Territorial and Border Disputes* fails to mention the issue among its endless lists, although its regional map shows the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh within Soviet Azerbaijan. Whatever the longstanding origins of the

dispute, therefore, it is right to see it as a product of the Soviet reforms. Not just a test of their "limits", for this is too clichéd and static a view. It is a product of the different, perhaps contradictory, dynamics involved in Gorbachev's revolution.

The Soviet leadership as a whole is convinced that *perestroika* is essential. Without economic reconstruction and quite new levels of productivity and efficiency, the USSR will be unable to hold its own internationally. They know this better than anyone. Thus Gorbachev is not a Khrushchev figure; he expresses a collective need for a new programme. Should he last ten years (as Khrushchev did, from 1954 to 1964) Gorbachev will succeed. If he goes soon, as he might, a programme called *perestroika* will continue.

“The very notoriety of “alien” influence everywhere means a social force indigenous to the planet in our century is hard at work. Each nationalism proclaims its uniqueness with all the intensity it can muster. But all are variations on themes of identity and development”

But not Gorbachev's version of it. His opponents within the central apparatus are not conservatives but a different kind of Communist radical. Today, it would be senseless to try and return to the Brezhnev era in the way that Brezhnev himself sought to preserve the status quo after 1964. The present economic reforms are the result of consensus, however reluctant, forced on the party hierarchy by the undeniable reality of failure. The only important argument in the Soviet leadership today is over what sort of *perestroika* there should be.

In the latest issue of *Detente* (which continues its excellent discussion of Soviet development), Yegor Ligachev is described as a "War Communist". Ligachev is the Number 2 in the Politbureau, and not exactly Gorbachev's deputy (he is ten years his senior by age). Rather, he is an alternative leader of indubitable probity who wants to rid Soviet society of corruption and impose efficiency from above. Indeed, without his alliance with Ligachev it is unlikely that Gorbachev could have sustained his position in the party.

Nonetheless, it is hard to believe that there is not a serious difference of emphasis between them, because Gorbachev's programme calls also — however uneasily — for a revolution from below, to accompany his transformation at the top. What he wants is economic enterprise, because he and his advisors have understood that no reform will work unless initiative is given its head. Once people are told to take action for themselves, however, why should they restrict this to the economic sphere alone?

Corruption

The Armenian twist is that the protest demonstrations follow demands from Moscow for an end to corruption in the Republic — demands that bear the mark of a Ligachev campaign. Corruption, of course, is a form of economic initiative, which after years of accumulation may invest the whole economic-political apparatus of local administration. It seems likely that the protests in Yerevan and Nagorno-Karabakh have been encouraged by the Armenian Party apparatus, which has used the advent of relaxation and the slogan of democracy to defend its ensconced privileges against the tougher demands of the Kremlin.

But if this is true, why should a population that has suffered from corruption rally so massively behind its perpetrators? One answer may be drawn from a parallel situation. Recently there was a strike of bus drivers in Chekhov, a small town outside Moscow. One of the strikers said that it wasn't just a question of money, it was also that there were no cafés where you could eat, nowhere to rest at the terminal, and no housing. In short everything was wrong, and an incompetent wage reform by the local manager merely lit the fuse.

Equally, the mobilisation of Armenians is unlikely to be just a nationalist expression of resentment at (possibly worsening) Muslim-Azeri harassment of Christian-Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave. The demonstrations are almost certainly a massive demand from below for far-reaching economic and social reform — ie for *perestroika* — because in Armenia, too, Soviet life is packed with frustration.

The paradox is painful: the new Kremlin administration has inherited a system choked by failure. It attempts to transform the system and, naturally, there is resistance. The worse this gets the more the new revolution becomes essential. At some point, there can be no alternative but to see it through. Armenia shows that novel hopes have indeed been raised. Perhaps already any attempt to intensify social discipline in place of democratisation will provoke even more extensive mass resistance. The crisis of *perestroika* may be upon us.

Just as the destruction of the Prague Spring devastated the prospects for socialism in the west after 1968, so the fate of the left in Europe is again bound up with the Kremlin's response to the desire for national emancipation. To understand this we

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‘The danger now is loss of nerve and hence momentum. Should the party now lose confidence in its policy towards the future, the Soviet Union itself could start to unravel’

need to move beyond clichés about empires relaxing control. The Soviet system simply has to change. *Perestroika* is not a foible, nor is *glasnost* just for newspapers. Both are a consequence of the impact of the modern world.

Perestroika and Thatcherism

Today, the left rather dislikes the modern world, and prefers conservation. At the same time Mrs Thatcher has proclaimed her admiration for Gorbachev's "fantastic courage" and compared it (with her usual modesty) to her own early years of imposing change in the United Kingdom. In the *Guardian* recently Richard Gott accepted the elision of Thatcher and Gorbachev solicited by the Prime Minister, though not the General Secretary. In fact Gorbachev's programme — his attempt to begin to democratise the USSR — is a socialist one. It is this that makes for his difficulties and contrasts with Thatcherism.

The Tory "revolution" after 1979 sought to dismantle central economic controls, and to free economic initiatives. Here the parallel with Soviet change holds. But Thatcher also strengthened the central state, broke movements for local autonomy, and beefed up police surveillance. The decisive moment that confirmed her position and gave her the power to ram through her dismantling of the corporate state was military victory in the South Atlantic.

By contrast, Gorbachev's programme calls for simultaneous economic and political liberalisation, a withdrawal from Afghanistan rather than intervention in the third world, a lessening of police supervision, and greater attention to people's local autonomy and demands. He is obliged to take this double risk because of the way Stalinist centralisation combined economic and political controls.

But if his colleagues in the Politburo and Central Committee, such as Ligachev, perceive only the risk to their own authority, hesitation could ensue. The danger now is loss of nerve and hence momentum. The consequences could be appalling. In the USSR there can be few, if only thanks to three years of Gorbachev's speeches, who believe in the past. Should the party now lose confidence in its policy towards the future, the Soviet Union itself will be at risk and could start to unravel.

For *perestroika* is not, after all, a merely economic programme. The Soviet Union is a multinational entity with a severe problem of identity. To Brezhnev's generation Soviet powers meant a war Communism that worked. Today, *perestroika* is an attempt to find a peacetime Soviet identity. Abroad, this means disarmament. At home, that nation shall thrive beside nation. ☐

Anthony Barnett's *Soviet Freedom* has just been published by Picador at £3.95.

New Statesman 11 March 1988

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Alfred Nzo
Secretary General,
African National Congress

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ANC

From 'who governs' to 'how to survive'

The era of "intellectuals" is over, argues

JOHN BERGER. *But will they be*

replaced by public relations experts or

spokespeople for the governed?

AS I WRITE, epidemics follow the floods in the shanty towns of Rio de Janeiro. The US Congress refused to give Reagan more funds for the Contras in Nicaragua; nevertheless the Contra mercenaries, operating against an elected government, will continue to be financed from the United States by private money. For several years now, millions of working families in the north of my own country have been abandoned and written off in their misery of unending unemployment.

It is necessary, I think, to recall such facts before a discussion concerning "the intellectual", a discussion which inevitably has to consider the tenuous relationship between theory and practice.

Then I want to admit a personal conflict within myself. The artist within me — the story-teller, the poet — tolerates badly what he understands by "intellectuals". For him their use of words is (usually) so facile that it resembles lying. At the same time the intellectual within me — the polemicist, the art theoretician, the social analyst — considers that all artists run the risk of pathological egocentricity.

The word *intellectual* — referring to a person — was first used during the nineteenth century. The term referred essentially to a new type of publicist, not to be confused with the earlier categories of scholar, historian, philosopher, humanist, teacher, scientist. What exactly was his function? Can any generalisation cover the full range of examples available? From Ruskin to George Orwell, from d'Annunzio to Ego Kisch? It may help to ask: why did the nineteenth century offer or demand a new kind of life's work.

A new intellectual space had been created in Europe — and the phenomenon was essentially European — by literacy and therefore by the

growing presence of newspapers, pamphlets and popular books; and, equally, by the newly-won principle of democracy, whereby government and government decisions were meant to be subject to public opinion, publicly (as distinct from secretly) mobilised either *en masse*, or in pressure groups.

The intellectual and the journalist were born at about the same time, to work in the same field. Their roles could overlap, but they were different. The intellectual offered opinions; the journalist offered events. It seems to me that these opinions were all charged, by an unanswered, unresolved question which hung over the European century of 1840-1940.

*It is not only the survival
of nature which is threatened,
but also the survival
of politics and
culture — which is to
say the survival of human
self respect*

This persistent question was: *Who is governing whom and by what right?* It led to a myriad other questions because, so long as it remained unanswered, nothing could be taken for granted concerning the justices of the *status quo* in any domain. It is interesting to note here the proverbial enmity between lawyers and intellectuals. Both pleaded: the first before judges, the second before readers; the first according to a legal code, the second before open horizons.

The same café

This new, urgent, unanswered question constituted a kind of no-man's-land between rulers and ruled. And it was on this terrain that intellectuals spoke, each one with her or his individual voice. Both rulers and ruled, the voted and the voters, needed these voices. The rulers needed them (or some of them) so that they, the rulers, might be legitimised. Rule in itself no longer carried its own justification. The ruler needed the voices (or some of them) so that their own aspirations might be articulated and claimed within a framework of modern thought and action.

My use of the word *voices* is perhaps misleading. I do not want to suggest that intellectuals served simply as a chorus. They reasoned, they thought, they looked backwards and forwards in history, they sometimes displayed great independence and courage. They were listened to, however, because their voices, filling the no-man's-land of an unanswered fundamental political question, were doubly needed. However sombre or affirmative

their arguments, the intellectuals of this European century spoke in a tone of supreme confidence. This confidence came, not usually from their conclusions, but from their awareness of being doubly needed.

Some belonged to the left and represented the new aspirations, others belonged to the right and offered legitimacy. Yet however opposed their positions, most intellectuals in their heyday formed a single cultural group. Members of opposing factions might even go to the same café. They constituted a modern confraternity, and in their texts and explanations continually referred to one another.

Their century is now finished. It is over because the unanswered question has not been answered! but superseded. *Who is governing whom?* has been replaced by Consumerism, with its dreams of acquisition and, even more powerful, its fears of deprivation. A fatal feature of our present societies is that Consumerism and unemployment go hand in hand. Little of course, or nothing, passing between the hands.

On the no-man's-land has been built a super-market. Most social and political issues are now treated with public relations and marketing techniques. These include media publicity, instant public opinion polls and a new art of political address adapted for television. The essential aim of such an art is to simulate "sincerity", whereby the ruler appears to speak to the ruled as if their relationship were an intimate one, as if there were no distance or disputed ground between them. To some degree the professional interviewer who provokes this "intimacy" has replaced both the intellectual and the journalist.

Thus neither rulers nor ruled have much need of intellectuals in the old traditional sense. Those who rule are today legitimised by manufactured popularity, while the aspirations of the majority of the ruled are temporarily smothered by manipulated consumerist fears and promises. It is here that advertising achieves its political, as distinct from economic, purpose: politics have become management.

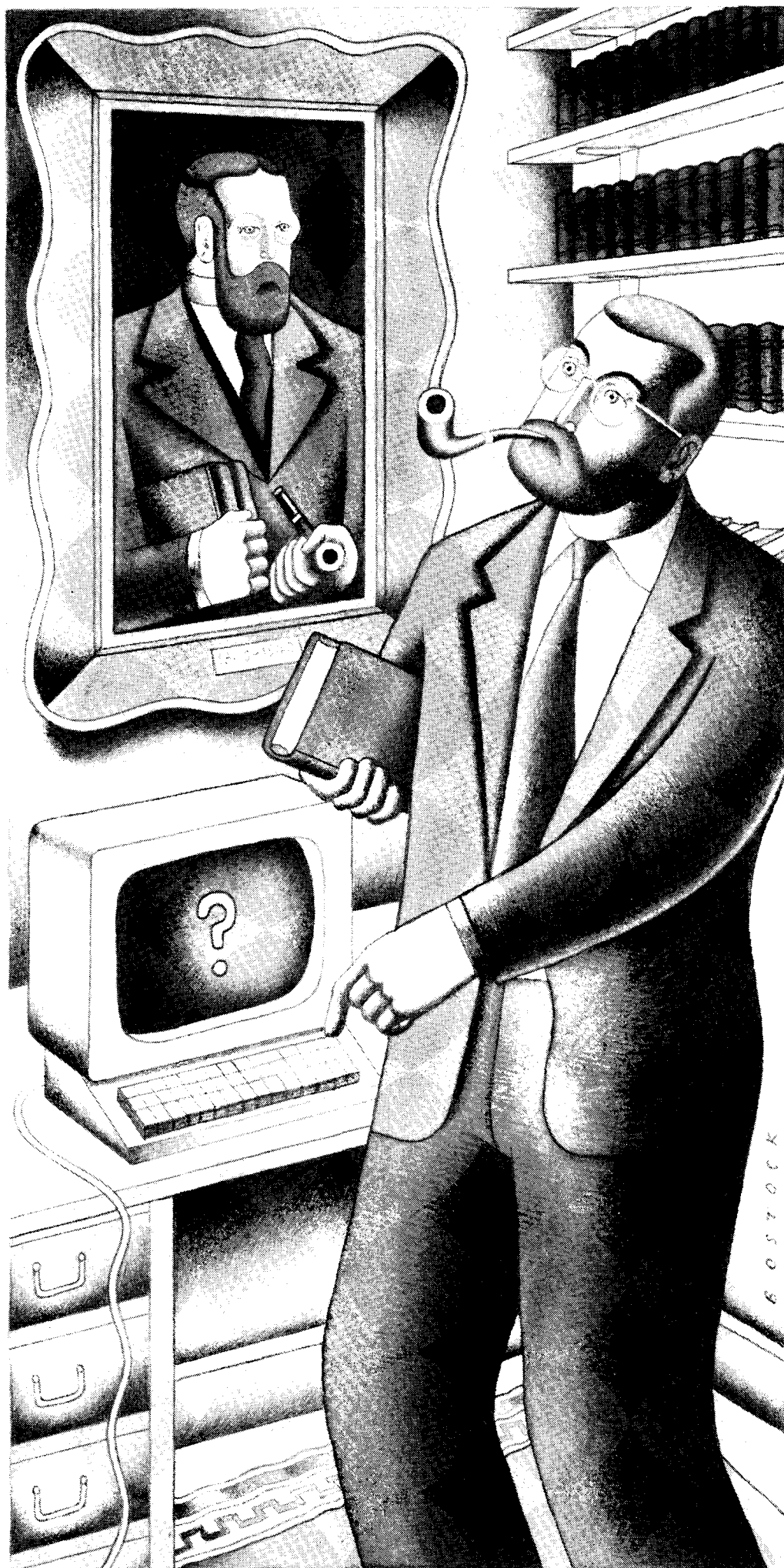
When it is noted that no new intellectual "stars" have replaced those of the last generation (of, say, Sartre or Bertrand Russell) there is no reason to deduce a generational insufficiency. They would be there today if the space for them were open. It has been closed — along with the question which animated their first appearance.

The telephone has just interrupted me. A call from New York from a man I don't know. Ron Carver, a union organiser. He is collecting money to buy paintings by Ralph Fasanella, who, now in his 70s, is probably the only true proletarian painter of Manhattan — most of his life he earned his living as a worker. Private collectors have begun to acquire his canvases to decorate their homes. Ron Carver is buying them to give to

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museums so that those whose lives the paintings are about will be able to see them for themselves. A boost to their confidence.

Survival of self-respect

Those who yesterday might have been traditional intellectuals may tomorrow perform another role, for which as yet there is no clear name. Gramsci foresaw this development when he spoke of a future need for “organic intellectuals”, by which he meant thinkers and spokespeople who belonged “organically” to the ruled.

Fifty years after Gramsci, we can perhaps more easily understand what this means. The nominal question about government has been replaced by a more fundamental and organic one: *How to survive?*

This question may seem minimalist, but in fact it is total. Ultimately the future of the world depends upon it. It begins with the entire planet and the threat of nuclear war. It concerns the life of cities, communities, national minorities, poor nations. How to survive in Rio de Janeiro, in Nicaragua or in Rochdale?

It would be a mistake to believe that the question can be reduced to a purely ecological one — important as this is. It is not only the survival of nature which is threatened, but also the survival of politics and culture — which is to say the survival of human self-respect.

For self-respect to survive, it is necessary that the long historical experience of the rule be at last articulated in such a way that it offers a sense to life, an explanation of the world, which can challenge the opportunism, ruthlessness and anonymity of corporate power — in both its economic and military practices. Every day these practices ignore, violate, trivialise and insult such experience.

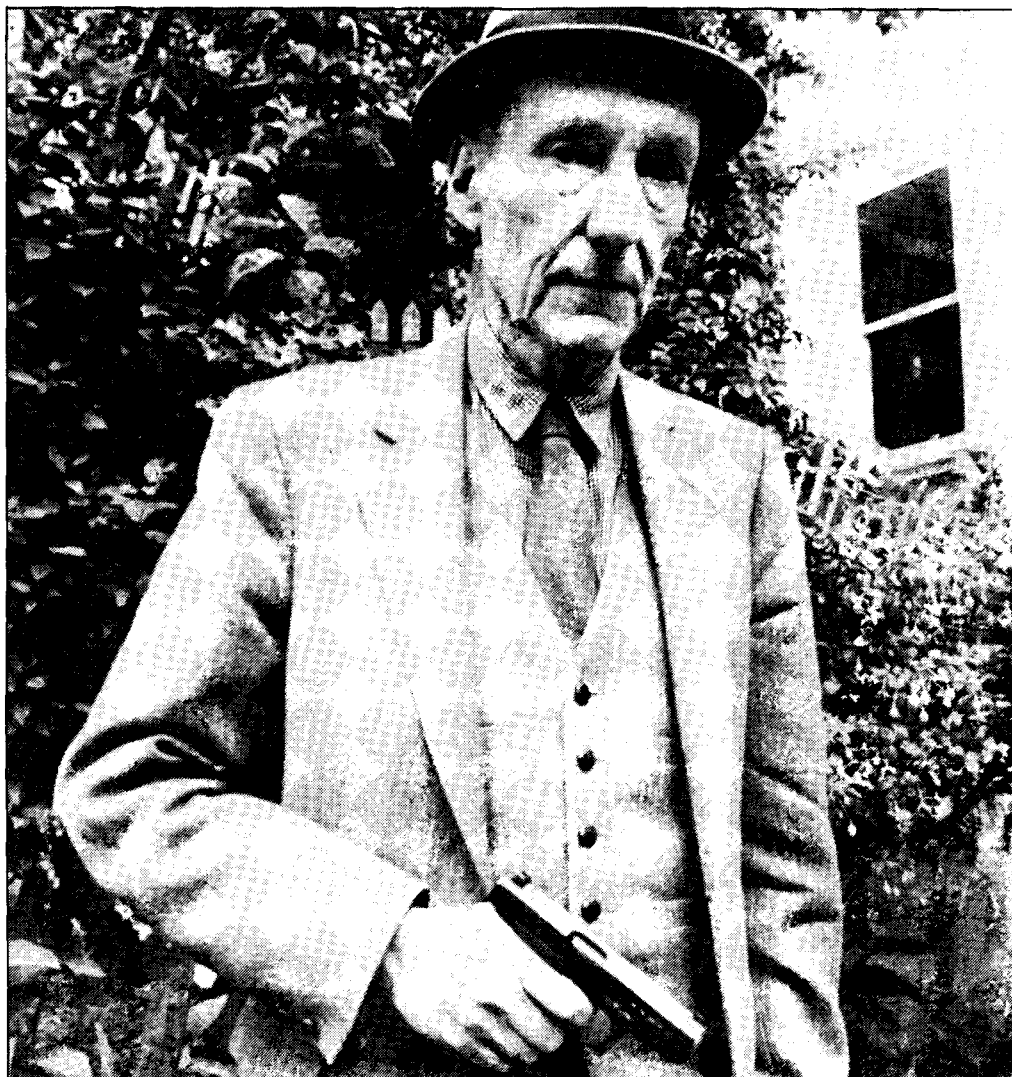
A striking feature of our time is that its sense of history is now most intense not in universities, but in popular movements of survival and struggle. Faced with the infantilism or barbarism of ruling elites, the initiative of maturity has passed to the underprivileged and displaced. One is reminded of the New Testament.

Collective nostalgia is always a form of privileged decay. Primitivism is usually a mask for cruelty. Modern technology is essential to the modern world. The danger is that the instantaneity of its techniques defines its aims. Instant greed. Instant prestige. The instant future. This is why a sense of history has become a condition for our survival.

The most urgent task today for those who might once have been traditional intellectuals is to invoke the historical experience of the ruled, to underwrite their self-respect, and to proffer — not to display — intellectual confidence. □

John Berger is a former Art Critic of the New Statesman, and author of Ways of Seeing (1972) and About Looking (1980).

Books



Sad beyond description

WILLIAM BURROUGHS has always been trying to write the last word: from the notorious *The Naked Lunch* (1959), through the cut-up novels of the 1960s, to the recent, elegiac trilogy whose final volume, *The Western Lands*, is published in Britain this week. Now that he has probably done it, **OLIVER HARRIS** reviews the career of a writer whom critics have marginalised and the public tends to see as sensationalist, but who, he argues, has created some of the most extraordinary literature this century.

APART FROM *The Naked Lunch*, a book which remains his masterpiece partly because it condenses enough inventive and comic brilliance for three, all of Burroughs' work can be divided into trilogies. Planned long in advance, **The Western Lands** (Picador, £10.95) is the final volume of a

trilogy written over the past 13 years. Volume one, the retrospective historical Utopia *Cities of the Red Night*, was published in 1981, to be followed by *The Place of Dead Roads* (1984), an sf Western whose memorial structure converted cameos of autobiography into melancholy epitaphs for Burroughs' personal *temps perdu*. The latest work, whose title refers to the Egyptian goal of immortality, brings one of the most remarkable of 20th-century literary oeuvres to a close.

Burroughs has always been trying to write the last word, and failing. At the end of *The Western Lands* the "old writer", still bearing the success of *The Naked Lunch* like an albatross around his neck, "couldn't write any more because he had reached the end of words, the end of what can be done with words". The heat that was "closing in" on Burroughs at the beginning of *The Naked Lunch*, and which mercilessly drove him forward, has all but closed down now; "Thermodynamics," as that book apocalyptically announced and his current one repeats, "has won at a crawl."

In *The Western Lands* entropy is personal: "His

self is crumbling away to shreds and tatters, bits of old songs, stray quotations, fleeting spurts of purpose and direction sputtering out to nothing and nowhere, like the body at death deserted by one soul after the other." However, the image of physical decline merely catches up with the past; all Burroughs' books have been posthumous, ghost-writing. Inspired to write by Jack Kerouac in the 1940s, he started with *Junky* (1953), a documentation of the death-in-life of addiction in New York and Mexico. After tramping through South America in a series of picaresque nightmares published in *The Yage Letters* (1963), Burroughs' anonymous narrator William Lee returned from the realm of dead souls to warn the living about junk in all its forms. "Writing, if it is anything, is a word of warning," he notes in *The Western Lands*. Like the Ancient Mariner, whose admonitory example pervades *The Naked Lunch*, Burroughs held his readers' attention as reluctant Wedding Guests, using the manic vaudeville "routines" evolved in *Queer* (written in 1952, though only published in 1985). There, Lee vainly attempted to entrap his victim, Eugene Allerton, through comic tours de force born of unrequited affection and the compulsive need of the withdrawing addict for an audience, any audience.

In *The Western Lands* Allerton reappears with an "air of arrested age", as well he might, still trapped like a fly within the amber of Burroughs' fictional world. Echoing tropes of their author's own need to "stoppeh one of three" and teach his tale, none of Burroughs' shadowy characters can escape into death, but are condemned to repeat themselves from book to book. This dependency, manifested in the bond between writer and reader, is the habit that Burroughs has tirelessly tried to kick. His efforts to write the last word led to the experiments of the cut-up years, when Burroughs produced some of the most extraordinary writing of this or any other century.

Anomalous and idiosyncratic, Burroughs' work has rarely been accorded the respect, understanding, or serious attention it has deserved. In an era of massive critical activity, he remains one of the few major writers whose collected works outnumber works about him, by a factor of almost ten to one. The 1963 "UGH" review in the *TLS* set a norm, making Burroughs' name a by-word for sick sensationalism. As an American novelist he was labelled leader of the angry Beat brigade; as an experimenter in the tradition of Dada and Surrealism, he stood for the dirty avant-garde. In those days, the single-mindedness and reckless verve that characterised his attitude to writing saved him from total surrender to the cult of underground notoriety.

Looking back on the heyday of those avant-garde explorations, launched in 1959 by his development of the "cut-up" method, he writes in *The Western Lands* with a melancholy pathos for what "seemed real at the time", born of contrast with his present situation: "So here I am in Kansas with my cats, like the honorary agent for a planet that went out light years ago. Maybe I am. Who will ever know?" An old man with his cats, to whom he is genuinely devoted: Big Bad Bill, once the radical *bête noir* of American fiction, is Sweet William

now? Except for his retrospective self-doubt, made poignant by the scars of age, is nothing new? Over 30 years ago, when *The Naked Lunch* consisted of only a few fragments of comic satire scattered among the syringes on the floor of his Tangier apartment, Burroughs the addict and would-be author asked: "What am I doing here, a broken eccentric, a Bowery Evangelist . . . an old man with the wasted years ahead having seen The Facts? A trunk full of notes to dump in a Henry St lot?"

Isolation and searing nostalgia have been Burroughs' constant companions, at one time driving and now tempering the heat of his iconoclastic aesthetic and biting black humour. "Over the hills and far away" may not be the only tune that he could play, but it has long been his most potent and haunting. That melody of lyrical doom, snatches of which have flashed through even his most violently terroristic writing, betrayed awareness that all his scientific rigour as a writer to overreach his medium, were too late. In *The Naked Lunch*: "Your plan was unworkable then and useless now . . . Like Da Vinci's flying machine plans. . ."

When asked which, if any, critic of his work he admired, Burroughs named John Updike for his review of *Port of Saints* (1975), a seemingly perverse choice, since Updike dismissed the book as "claptrap". But he also observed that Burroughs' nostalgic landscapes "convince us that he has seen and done things sad beyond description", a comment that goes to the heart of Burroughs, identifying the ghostly human presence that wanders through the Infernal Machinery of his writing, unable to escape.

The curious blend of uncompromising surreal violence and sentimental pathos in his cut-up trilogy created a collage of obsessively recycled souvenirs turned into *momento mori* by the destructive pace of the prose. In retrospect, *The Soft Machine* (1961), *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962) and *Nova Express* (1964) appear as both stunning experimental works and literary dead-ends. Exploiting complex patterns of repetition and buried references, their effect is to solicit flashes of *déjà vu* on the reader, startled instants of kinship and recognition. In *The Place of Dead Roads* William Seward Hall "concealed and revealed the knowledge in fictional form. Only those for whom the knowledge is intended will find it". Burroughs has never sought to make converts, only to find allies. In a strange way, his works, like those of Whitman, are love letters, advertisements for the "camerado true" that could only be himself.

Practising piracy on the High Seas of literature, Burroughs looted what he termed "bits and pieces of vivid and vanishing detail" from innumerable fellow-members of the Shakespeare Squadron, including Conrad from whose *Lord Jim* the phrase derived. The result was far from random plagiarism, each fragment a precise mirror shard reflecting Burroughs and forming a mosaic part of what, in *The Western Lands*, he calls the Big Picture.

The Western Lands concludes with echoes of two texts repeatedly incorporated into his writing, Eliot's "Waste Land" and Joyce's story "The Dead", as the snow flakes fall softly on the dying writer and the last call is heard for the last time; "Hurry up, please. It's time." His pilgrimage through the place of dead roads to the western lands, picking up the last bric-a-brac pieces for his

mythology, aspires to the immortality of the writer, his after-life dependent on his readers. "Ye who read are still among the living," wrote Edgar Allen Poe, "but I who write shall have long since gone my way into the region of shadows." □

BLUEPRINTS

Getting it right

Stephen Howe

The Unprincipled Society: New Demands and Old Politics

DAVID MARQUAND *Cape* £18

WAY BACK IN 1977, when Margaret Thatcher's front teeth were still crooked, seven million people still worked in British manufacturing and David Marquand was still a Labour MP, he published a splendid, highly empathetic biography of Ramsay MacDonald. Its final lines pointed to an intended moral of MacDonald's career: the need for "intellectual coherence and a willingness to jettison cherished assumptions in the face of changing realities." The past half century in British political life, Marquand suggested, showed conspicuous failure to achieve these qualities.

David Marquand now returns at much greater length to that theme of failure just as the SDP, in which he was a crucial founding figure, flounders and fragments. *The Unprincipled Society* is a contribution to an overfamiliar genre: doom-laden overview of British economic decline plus more-or-less tentatively proposed remedy. Yet in breadth of vision and quality of argument, this book stands far above almost all else in the mode. Much of its diagnosis is more conventional, less pathbreaking, than the author suggests and the proposals for change are frustratingly sketchy; but this is an important and a challenging work.

Marquand opens with a ringing declaration that we can understand Britain's "problems of adjustment" only through surveying a broad sweep of the national past. What follows is indeed in large part a primer in British history: mostly of the last two centuries, though with more than a few glances back to the Stuarts. It is a clear, sharply-argued, boldly-drawn overview, simplifying without being simplistic, argumentative without posturing or partisanship. One seems to hear echoes of professional lectures behind parts of it, and very good lectures they must have been too. Yet it is for much of its length a primer in the *orthodoxies* of modern British historiography. The orthodox is not, of course, necessarily the erroneous. Nonetheless, the vision of British development here would be more compelling if Marquand had engaged with the claims of those (as diverse as Perry Anderson, Arno Mayer and Jonathan Clark) who have suggested a radically different view of the "persistence of the old regime"; and of those like Tom Nairn and Raymond Williams who would trace the disabilities of the British state to foundations in nationalism rather than, as Marquand would have it, in individualism.

Yet it would be grossly misleading to imply that Marquand's book is merely a stimulating but rather conventional essay in contemporary his-

tory. The argument he builds on that sketch has some striking features. Britain's central failure lay in her ruling elites' not making the transition from a market liberalism arguably appropriate for early industrialisation to the state-sponsored developmental ethos necessary today. This in turn, he suggests, arose from a twofold flaw: the hegemony of an archaic model of parliamentary sovereignty and, even more profoundly, the domination of our political culture by competitive, possessive individualism. The intellectual progenitors of our plight are not Marx or Hayek, Keynes or Callaghan — though Marquand has some harsh words for all these — but rather Locke and Bentham. Neither the Keynesian social democracy which dominated postwar thought, nor the doctrines which have challenged it, are adequate responses to this deep-rooted British malaise. Britain can become a developmental state only through far-reaching institutional reforms, amounting to a wholly new view of government and devoted above all to creating a framework in which communitarian values may grow and the individualist "politics of command and exchange" wither away.

Marquand mounts an impressive critique of the doctrines of Tory Right and Labour Left, "neo-liberalism" and "neo-socialism" as he calls them. It is impressive partly because it is so far removed from the usual attacks on these ideologies made from the centre. Here there are no clichés of false temporality — self-substantiating claims of newness versus atavism — or of mould-breaking, even though Marquand himself was the probable guilty father of that awful catchphrase. He offers perceptive criticism of the lack of strategic purchase in even the most intellectually impressive socialist theories of crisis; though he does not show much awareness of new radical writing from outside Britain. He provides also one of the most suggestive accounts I have read of why a Conservative doctrine supposedly devoted to rolling back the state has presided over its authoritarian extension.

This, however, raises the first of two major flaws in Marquand's conclusions; for he says almost nothing about the civil libertarian implications of these developments. He evidently favours firmer protection of citizen rights, extension of participation in government, and fuller opportunities for self-realisation: but he seems to value these as means to social peace and economic revival rather than as ends in themselves. Here his hostility to individualist liberalism may be leading him to jettison its strengths along with its errors. Marquand evidently regrets that the New Liberalism won its battle against Chamberlain's social imperialism early this century: he shows an alarming blindness to the anti-democratic strain in social imperialist thought.

Second, Marquand's sketch for the future leaves a huge question-mark hanging over the problem of agency. He gives no hint of what social groups, intellectual currents or political formations might possibly implement his desires. One may guess that when he began writing Marquand looked to the Alliance as transformer, but that this light is failing for him. David Owen's social market ideas, indeed, are argued to be quite incoherent. Marquand believes that if the "tough" assumptions about market behaviour on which they are premised are true, then the "tender" redistributive welfare proposals cannot possibly gain acceptance. □

BIOGRAPHY

Desire to please

Victoria Radin

Sylvia Plath

LINDA W. WAGNER-MARTIN *Chatto* £12.95

IN 1963, WHEN she was 30 years old, Sylvia Plath committed suicide. All her life she had battled her private monsters of good and evil. "Who will give me a child, that will bring me again to be a member of that race which throws snowballs at me, sensing perhaps the rot at which they strike?" she wrote (with uncharacteristic awkwardness) when she was 23 and a student at Cambridge.

That rotten perception of herself spreads everywhere in her journal; it forms the texture of most of her best poems. Perhaps it was the result of the inevitable failure of her desire to please everyone, to be the all-successful, all-American good girl she nearly was. Or perhaps that desire to please, to be perfect in every way, was the bright paint she threw over the image of her rottenness. While Sylvia elaborated her sense of self-disgust in her diaries ("... what is tragedy? I am.") she fabulised her life to the outside world, presenting a vivacious, rosy and in all senses winning complexion.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in *Letters Home*, a volume of the effusions written to her mother every few days from the age of 17 when she went away to Smith College until a month before her death. I once saw a theatrical adaptation of these letters which highlighted the bat-squeaks of anger and dependence that lay behind their protestations of radiance. Awards, scholarships, elections, publications, her marriage to Ted Hughes ("the only man in the world who is my match"), even the deliveries of her two children, form a catalogue of successes recounted to the mother under whose roof Sylvia had first attempted, with utmost seriousness, to kill herself when she was 20, and whom a great, secret part of herself deeply hated. "I guess I need somebody to cheer me up by saying I've done all right so far," she wrote in her last letter to Dear Mother. It was an uncommonly direct request for validation. All her life Plath had done a whitewash job on her misgivings.

Self-glorification and the search for success for its own sake, even if it is only to hide rottenness, is not an enlightening activity. But Linda W. Wagner-Martin in *Sylvia Plath: A Biography* grasps it to her bosom and stumbles down the football pitch, shouldering psychological truths out of her way.

Nearly all the life is taken at Sylvia's public estimation of it: Wagner-Martin never questions what Plath thought she was doing all those years writing, along with good poetry, bad stories for the women's magazines whose values she despised; she goes gushingly along with Plath's really rather silly student editorial stint at the glossy *Mademoiselle* ("this honour") while only laconically cataloguing Sylvia's concurrent prizes for poetry at Smith and publication in the excellent *Harpers*. She does not quote from or analyse the poems at all. There are "life choices" and "value judgements" and "role models": dead words, unambi-



guous and stupendously incurious. When she attempts a rare interpretation, the results show a lack of imaginative sympathy that suggests that (probably for the wrong reasons) she does not like her subject much at all. "Always central in the life of her family, Sylvia expected events to revolve around her," is Wagner-Martin's bizarre explanation of why, on the day Sylvia's father died, the child of eight asked her mother to sign a note saying she would never remarry. But what person who

Leon Bakst's designs for dance in Paris in the second and third decades of the century, particularly for the *Ballets Russes*, made him a cult. Stravinsky said of one of the ballets that Bakst "played possibly the main role": a position of dominance that stage designers continue to occupy on the Continent to this day. Often "Oriental" in theme, strong on line but meticulously detailed and glowing with unexpected combinations of colour, which Bakst used quite consciously to enhance the emotional content of the music, his designs generated a sideline in ladies' fashions and interior decoration. But Bakst also wrote the books for many ballets, designed exhibitions, did book illustrations, portraiture and epic painting, essays and journalism. **BAKST** (Viking, £20), which seeks to secure his position as a proteus of the brush and pen, is good on plates from his lesser known work in painting; the portraits, ranging from the young Cocteau to the artist's small son in his high-chair, are particularly impressive. Irina Pruzhan's text, translated with a dead hand from the Russian, obscures rather than clarifies the work and life of this innovative artist. (Victoria Radin)

had read, as she says, "every scrap" of Plath's writings, who had interviewed 200 people on her behalf and perhaps (though the evidence is meagre) even read the poems, could write in her Preface: "Plath was a feminist, in the broad sense of the term: she never undervalued herself or her work"? Plath was mistress of undervaluing.

The book gives one less insight and only a few more facts than one could piece together by oneself from Plath's own published letters and diaries, A.

Alvarez's perceptive account of her last days in *The Savage God* and, indeed, the verse itself. This last moves so irresistibly towards a total fusion of life and art that Plath's last poem, written a week before her suicide, forsee it with perfect clarity: "The woman is perfected. Her dead/Body wears the smile of accomplishment . . ."

Even in Wagner-Martin's only partial bibliography there are some 50 studies, anthologies, ruminations, recollections, bashings and gnashings of this poet who has been canonised and cannibalised by "feminists" looking, so illogically, for a victim-saint. Yes, as Wagner-Martin suggests, Plath was caught in her femaleness; but she was scuppered by her pathology. What she sought was control. She was able to construct her own death but couldn't take care of the after-life. □

USA

Don't look away

Peter Osborne

The Chomsky Reader

NOAM CHOMSKY *Serpent's Tail* £9.95

The Culture of Terrorism

NOAM CHOMSKY *Pluto* £25 and £9.95

THERE WAS MUCH CONCERN among American political scientists in the late 1970s about the spread of something they called "Vietnam Syndrome". This was not, as might be supposed, anything to do with the US government's apparently incurable tendency to intervene militarily in the internal affairs of foreign states. Rather, it was a condition taken to be affecting the American people themselves: a morbid aversion to the consequences of just such interventions.

If, despite the tactical adjustment represented by the use of proxies in Central America, this syndrome remains at all widespread (and there is evidence to suggest that it does), it is largely thanks to Noam Chomsky and those like him, who have devoted their time and energy to publicising and documenting the human rights abuses which are so integral a part of US foreign policy. More than anyone else, perhaps, Chomsky has acted as the moral conscience of the American people; holding up a mirror to the acts of government in order to show just what it means to the people of Third World countries for their governments to become the recipients of "humanitarian aid" from the USA.

Chomsky is probably best known in Britain for his work in linguistics. Yet, as the lengthy interview about his intellectual development which prefaces *The Chomsky Reader* reveals, politics and its morality (or, more generally, its lack of it) has always been his main concern. Brought up in the cauldron of Jewish radicalism amongst the East coast immigrant communities of the United States before the war, Chomsky's political roots lie deep in the European anarchist and syndicalist traditions of the 1930s. And it is anarchist themes which continue to dominate his work: the critique of the state and of the complicity of intellectuals in justifying and sustaining its abuses of power; the violence and hypocrisy which underlie the liberal-

democratic "consensus"; and, perhaps most important of all, an emphasis on the role of popular-democratic movements in the maintenance and extension of political freedoms.

The pieces collected together to form *The Chomsky Reader* range across the spectrum of Chomsky's political writings: from his essays on the responsibilities of intellectuals from the mid-'60s to excerpts and articles from the '80s on the New Cold War, the Middle East and Central America. A number of things stand out. One is the sheer geographical range of his interests, as he records the grim consequences of America's global role. Another, the thematic unity which nonetheless underlies and structures his depiction of that role. A third is the single-mindedness and moral seriousness with which he pursues his theme: the steady accumulation of evidence, the clarity and directness of the narrative line, the incisive use of historical and cross-cultural comparisons.

The argument — that economic self-interest, pursued by violence abroad and secrecy and deceit at home, lies at the core of American history — is a familiar one. It is in the detail of the demonstration and the disgust at its consequences (exemplified once more in his two recent pieces in the *New Statesman*) that the power of Chomsky's writing lies. Roosevelt's Four Freedoms (freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear), he argues, have in practice always been subordinated to a Fifth: "the freedom to rob, to exploit and dominate, to undertake any course of action to ensure that existing privilege is protected and advanced". It is through a deepening of his sense of the complexity of the processes through which this "Fifth Freedom" is exercised that Chomsky's writings have grown in strength over the years.

The renewed vigour which this gradual deepening of political perspective has imparted to Chomsky's work is displayed at full strength in *The Culture of Terrorism*, the latest in a series of

analyses of the current operational state of US policy. The book began life as a postscript to certain foreign editions of *Turning the Tide* (1985). This was subsequently expanded and appears now as what is effectively a companion volume to Chomsky's recent Managua lectures, published in the USA in 1987 as *On Power and Ideology*. Its topic is the twists and turns of policy which have followed the Iran-contra scandal since the autumn of 1986; its theme: the light which this episode throws upon the basic character of American political culture, and upon the possible constraints which may nonetheless be imposed upon the exercise of power within this culture, however indirectly, by popular protest.

In particular, Chomsky is concerned to stress the "not insubstantial achievement" of popular oppositional movements in forcing US state terror underground in the late 1970s. For, he argues, this created the conditions for the foreign policy scandals of the mid-1980s. These have, if only temporarily, both weakened the government's position and given a fresh impulse to the opposition. This, in turn, has created a small "window of opportunity" for regional attempts to secure an alternative basis for the resolution of current conflicts. And what Chomsky maintains is that the "passive compliance" of those who fail actively to oppose the existing system is at base no different, morally, from that of those who chose "to look the other way" during the persecution of Jews in Germany in the '30s.

One may have reservations about the way in which, in certain of his more theoretical pieces, Chomsky seems to over-generalise his critique of American political science to throw doubt upon the usefulness of any social scientific approach to human behaviour; or harbour doubts about the moral simplicity of his populism. Yet it is precisely in this simplicity that the distinctiveness of Chomsky's contribution to the political thought of the times lies. □

CAMBRIDGE

The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949

BENNY MORRIS

Based on recently declassified Israeli, British and American state and party political papers and previously untapped private papers, this book traces the stages of the 1947-9 exodus against the backdrop of the first Arab-Israeli war and analyses the varied causes of the flight. Throughout, Benny Morris attempts to describe what actually happened rather than what Israeli and Arab propagandists have said happened.

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African Studies Series 58



Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 2RU, England.

SF/FANTASY

Your planet or mine?

Colin Greenland

FROM GANDALF to Jubal Harshaw is but a change of clothes and a shave. The ostensible distinction between fantasy (magical, archaic, myth-bound) and science fiction (logical, futuristic, scientific) breaks on two hard rocks: the fact of reading and the fact of writing.

Booksellers are quite right to shelve the two genres together, mixed or side by side, because most of their readers do too. Many writers, especially the most able, such as John Crowley and Gene Wolfe, routinely produce work which confounds taxonomy by satisfying both sets of requirements, while others, like C.J. Cherryh, happily switch from one to the other without breaking step.

Visible Light (Methuen, £2.95) a collection of Cherryh's stories, includes some dispensable short pieces and an ill-advised linking sequence in which the author presents herself as a buttonholing, browbeating middle-aged mariner, the sort of company you would least welcome on a dull space voyage. But the longer stories here are excellent. In prose which is substantial if not always shapely, they demonstrate her characteristic hard, clear moral imagination, whether she writes of doom and blood-debt in earthy Celtic gloom; or wild swashbuckling in the odorous alleys of god-haunted, Lankhmarish Korianth; or a perilous relationship slowly and intricately forged on a pastoral planet between a lone human survivor and the artificial personality of his grounded spaceship.

Despite the claims of authors like Ben Bova that it is special because it foresees things, science fiction provides no loophole in historicism. The endurance of work from the '50s by Alfred Bester, say, or Philip K. Dick, has more to do with extremism of imaginative gestalt than with prediction. Once fulfilled, fictive prophecies lapse into inertia, becoming fact and therefore unremarkable. We have to be reminded that microcircuitry or boys in make-up were not obvious at the time.

By contrast, Bova's bland, balsa futures in **Escape Plus** (Methuen, £2.95) represent the degeneracy of pulp sf bled of its redeeming mania and infused with remedial liberalism. "Sire", Adela said breathlessly, 'you will be reuniting all the worlds of the Empire into a closely knit human community such as we haven't seen in centuries!' Well, perhaps. Or perhaps uplift only works when it's not somebody shoving you from behind.

Remorselessly lucid, but pushy too, is **The New Gulliver** (Women's Press, £3.95). Imagining a society of reversed sex-roles was a familiar device in sf even in 1979, when Esmé Dodderidge's Swiftian pastiche was first published. Employing Lemuel Gulliver (or rather an indistinguishable namesake of his) as a suffering straw-man must have seemed a worthwhile new wrinkle. Complacent, opinionated, slow on the uptake, Gulliver is an ideal male to cast up on the

shore of Capovolta, an intransigent matriarchy. Unfortunately he seems here to be lost in time too. He refers to "Dr Freud's ingenious theories" and makes a joke about a suffragette, but also uses terms like "the final O.K.", "a widespread subculture", and even "role reversal". It wouldn't matter whether this were the original Gulliver's son, a present-day lineal descendant, or someone in between, but it does matter that the author havers, because his assumptions about sex and society are consequently too unstable for her demolition of them to be satisfying.

Her book loses its satirical edge as it gains a plot, in which Gulliver is deserted by his Capovoltan wife and left to bring up twins on minimal support. Eventually accepting the fact of his own politicisation, Gulliver dwindles to a mouthpiece for truisms about cultural relativism and communal living. Swift was less protective, and more effective.

Pat Cadigan's **Mindplayers** (Gollancz, £10.95) uses the machinery of sf to scrutinise the faculty of fantasy. In a future society where "everybody wants to be somebody but nobody wants to be just *anybody*", mindplayers are technicians of the psyche, whose job is to enter, explore and redevelop inner space. Cadigan unlocks the casebook of one, Allie Haas. Surrealism, however, this is not. The mental vistas Allie inspects are disappointingly banal, featureless and cramped. The extraordinary asexuality of all the imagery, which would defy even the ingenious Dr Freud, suggests a degree of self-censorship in Cadigan calculated to appease cautious American publishers, but fatally compromising to the purpose of sf as a critical fiction. Her attempt to recover and incorporate this shortfall of imagination by having the therapist call herself "Deadpan Allie" and assert that most people are boring inside seems to me both insulting and untrue.

The fact is that the contemporary genres of fantasy and sf are both examples of a rich cultural heritage of the fantastic, much older and larger than the concept of mimetic realism. Radical authors invoking powerful ancestors like Swift or the surrealists may confuse readers whose earliest reference points are Tolkien and Heinlein, but it is one way to reinvigorate exhausted tropes.

Another is to identify the fossils, the obstructive myths, and attack them directly.

Neal Barrett Jr.'s **Through Darkest America** (NEL, £2.95) is a thoroughly grim, depressing book which is nonetheless welcome after the success of recent frontier-mentality muscle-flexing sf by the likes of Orson Scott Card and Gregory Benford. Set centuries after the War "when God cleansed sinners from the Earth", it accomplishes a slow, resolute, agonising destruction of the post-holocaust heroic fantasy. Structured as a Civil War Western complete with cattle drives, baked beans and calico dresses, it manages its transformations disturbingly lightly: the cattle, for example, are actually subjugated humans, bred for butchery because all the other animals are extinct. Out into this vile world comes Barrett's farmboy hero, and loses, and loses, and loses.

FICTION

Dream of flying

Leslie Dick

Baltasar and Blimunda

JOSÉ SARAGAMO trans. GIOVANNI PONTIERO
Cape £11.95

PART RADICAL HISTORY, part fairy tale, *Baltasar and Blimunda* is set in 18th-century Portugal, moving between the palace, where King Joao V and his Queen dutifully do sex in a setting of heavy luxury and slow ceremony, and the hovels where Baltasar, a soldier who lost a hand in the wars, and Blimunda, a clairvoyante who lost her mother to the Inquisition, love each other with real passion.

The imaginative connection between these two desperate worlds is sustained in the project of Padre Bartolomeu Lourenço, priest, scholar and scientist under royal protection, whose secret and heretical dream is to invent a machine than can fly. He enlists the help of Baltasar and Blimunda, who build the machine and gather the human wills that fuel it.

Domenico Scarlatti, employed as music master to the royal Infanta, visits them and returns to play his thrilling new music while they work. The great artificial bird they build together becomes an image of aspiration that's not only crazy but, in the context of brutal ignorance and repression that the Inquisition sustains, very dangerous.

Saramago presents a nation caught in the double stranglehold of a decadent royalty, funded by wealth from Brazil and India and Angola, and the immensely powerful church, which holds sway over the lives and imaginations of everyone. Even adventurous oddballs like Baltasar, Blimunda and Bartolomeu still think in the conceptual vocabulary of the church, and one of the ironies of the novel lies in their modernity as characters and their simultaneous subjection to the historical moment.

Power, religious and royal, is materialised in an endless series of processions: processions of flagellants in Lent, watched by palpitating women at their windows; processions of victims at an auto-da-fé; processions of statues of saints. People fall to their knees in the street when the Blessed Sacrament is carried by; nuns break out and march in mutiny against a royal decree to limit their visitors to their immediate family (an attempt to suppress the amorous intrigues and illicit pregnancies rampant in the convents). At the centre of the book is the construction of the great Franciscan monastery and palace at Mafra, where Baltasar works, which the King vowed to build in 1711 if God granted him an heir within the year. This pious vow entails the forced labour of every skilled workman in Portugal, as year after year more processions of men in chains are led to Mafra, against their will, in order to get the monastery finished. Thousands suffer and die in the process until the name Mafra stands for: "mauled, assaulted, fouled, robbed, abused".

The deadpan clarity and directness of Saramago's writing hold these extremes in a precise balance that continually moves into irony and out

again. The flying machine seems ordinary and believable, while the historically accurate accounts of religious and royal everyday life are hilarious, surreal fantasies of sado-masochistic ritual and meaningless ceremony.

History is the story of kings and queens, so the reference points that punctuate this floating text, pinning it down with specific dates and facts, are to royal moments of decision or action. The absolute divide between the lives of the rich and the poor is ironically played out through the artificial weaving of connections, the fabrication of a set of absurd parallels. The death of a child in Baltasar's family is related to the death of one of the royal princes, in a dark joke about God punishing both families equally.

Yet the poor inhabit a world of suffering, a living hell, while the rich decadently pursue the discourse of suffering that is religion, piously contemplating the agonies of the saints as they send yet another converted Jew to the stake. In the love between Baltasar and Blimunda, and their passionate dedication to the great artificial bird, Saramago beautifully creates an emotional centre to the book, as their humanity becomes the measure against which the brutality and misery of Portugal are portrayed. □

CRIME

On the pulse

Nick Kimberley

ABORTION, black-market adoption rackets, drug dealing, the revival of Christian fundamentalism as a political force: where better to look for their cultural impact than in the latest thrillers, which continue not so much to reflect current debates as to amplify them, sometimes to the point of distortion? The thrillers under consideration lack that brashness which would qualify them as pulp fiction, but they display a commendable ability to embrace "problems" while swept along on crime fiction's brisk narrative flow.

Lee Martin is an ex-policewoman now working on a PhD in creative writing at the University of Utah: if she sounds like a character from smug middlebrow satire, take heart; this is the author we're talking about, not some overdetermined fictional creation. *A Conspiracy of Strangers* (Quartet, £8.95) is a first-person narrative told by Deb Ralston, a cop whose story-telling style makes plenty of room for personal details: she's 42 years old, infertile, an adoptive mother with an ulcer (a sort of metaphoric and troublesome embryo).

Policewomen as central characters are still thin on the ground, although the popularity of *Cagney and Lacey* should by now have yielded a squad-roomful. Lee Martin makes Ralston a pleasant and not overly zealous copper, relatively sure of right and wrong, confident that the Law usually knows which is which. When she stumbles across the horribly brutalised corpse of a pregnant woman murdered while she was in labour, she uncovers a series of crimes which force her to search her soul on the subjects of abortion (a bad thing, but legal and sometimes necessary) and baby trafficking (no redeeming features unless done through official channels).

Martin pushes her character into situations

where she shows sympathy for society's peripherals — the poor, the uneducated — without addressing us from a soapbox. Such action as there is passes hastily, but the dyspeptic narrator is compensation enough. She looks "like somebody's sweet little auntie" and plays bingo, but in a crisis makes swift use of a gun: the pacifist police procedural is an as yet underdeveloped genre.

In America, you make your tough female investigator a gun-toting cop; in Britain she's a polytechnic lecturer — or at least she is in Barbara Deighton's *A Little Learning* (Quartet, £8.95). Whereas Martin's Deb Ralston "can't" have babies, Deighton's Felicity Travers tells us in her third sentence, "I hate sex" — as if the fictional act of investigation blocks off one part or other of a woman's sexuality. Or perhaps the reverse: since each woman, in the course of their respective narratives, "recovers" the lost sexual ingredient, it may be that their sexuality is only completed by the criminal quest.

Be that as it may, *A Little Learning* is a babbling torrent of a novel, its narrator tripping over her words as she seeks to cleanse her poly of the rot of drug-dealers. This is crime fiction as social work, but Deighton skilfully builds a character — albeit an irritating one — out of her breathless first-person barrage. There's a problem in the book's lack of events: with 20 pages to go, we're told that "the real action started next morning". Yet, by the end of her first novel, Deighton has a credible narrator who, with some refinement and stronger plotting, has the makings of a viable series character.

Sarah Dunant's *Snow Storms in a Hot Climate* (Michael Joseph, £10.95) also uses drug-dealing as a framework, but not in some Midlands polytechnic. The scope here is larger, embracing various bits of North and South America as well as Europe: Dunant would make a fine travel writer. Her narrator, too, is an unfulfilled woman, happy to be dragged from her academic cocoon to be battered by the real, criminal world.

Her academic objectivity is echoed by her distance from the events of her story: she has to be told, by various people, what is going on. Everything seems to have happened before she arrives, or while she enjoys a few unnecessary days in Paris. Still, Dunant gives a powerful account of two women's friendship torn apart by the love affair one of them has with an insufferable man. That's the story she has to tell: crime here is the merest peg.

Elmore Leonard's thrillers are amongst the most vivid portraits of street-level America. In *Touch* (Viking, £10.95) he abandons the thriller to tell a charmingly quirky parable in which his grip on the cement-hard details of reality is tempered by an easy willingness to embrace the unbelievable. An angelic young man seems to display Christ's healing abilities, as well as his stigmata. A fundamentalist Christian sect sees in him the means to advance its bigoted cause: will they succeed? The simple plot retains elements from Leonard's crime fiction: the familiar fearless villain is here a fanatical right-wing zealot; the hero's saintliness needs a strong woman to get it going. The edgy tension of the crime novel is missing, but it's an engaging piece of work. Leonard makes no secret of the fact that it was universally rejected when he wrote it in 1977 — before more prestigious writers (Walker Percy, William Gaddis) had turned their

attention to the rebirth of right-wing Christianity. The crime writer had his liberal finger on the pulse first. □

FICTION

The lost boys

Harriett Gilbert

Out of this World

GRAHAM SWIFT *Viking* £10.95

FATHERS stalk through Graham Swift's novels like silent, mutilated giants. Their strangely-shaped shadows unfurl across the lives of the narrators, but their selves have always just turned a corner, disappeared into another room.

Swift's "psychological thriller" *Shuttlecock*, published in 1981, concerned the pursuit by a young married man of the truth about his father's wartime heroism, and its relevance to certain unsettling events in his own life. The Booker short-listed *Waterland* (1983) sought out not only a specific father, but ancestors, those whose lives are our history, in general.

Out of this World returns to the theme: its variation being that here Swift not only has a narrator-son but provides that son, in turn, with a

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by Guy Standing

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daughter, whose narrative alternates with his. In the novel's present — 1982: the Task Force is approaching the Falklands — Sophie has moved to New York with her husband, a man who sells dreams of "historic" England to would-be tourists on 6th Avenue. Sexually restless, disturbed by her past, she talks to her psychoanalyst, trying to avoid revelations about her ex-photojournalist father, Harry, and concentrating instead on Harry's father, her Grandad: an arms manufacturer and war hero who was blown to pieces by a terrorist bomb in the back of his Daimler New Sovereign.

Grandad it was who brought Sophie up, while Harry, grieving for the death of Sophie's mother in a plane crash, roamed the horror spots of the world: snapped for his paper a Vietnamese mother clutching a blood-soaked child in her arms; three prisoners squatting in the Congo, blindfold, their necks linked together by rope; a screaming Cypriot boy in the fall-out from a mortar attack in 1964. . . A mother herself now, Sophie not only forbids her sons toy guns, she won't let a camera in the house. "You can shoot with both. You can load and aim with both. With both you can find your target and the rest of the world goes black."

Meanwhile, in England, Harry does his own analysis: remembering the battles with his father over his refusal to enter the family firm; his meeting with his Greek wife Anna, Sophie's mother, while covering the Nuremberg Trials; the heroic reputation he enjoyed in the '60s for having "been out there"; his father's Victoria Cross and his murder.

If all this sounds intimate, claustrophobic, I should say at once that it's nothing of the kind. Swift may place us firmly in his characters' heads, but only to lead us to their eye sockets: to show us, through those, the panorama of 20th-century politics and culture. The heads are vantage points; little more. Harry and Sophie are cardboard structures to provide the reader with a bird's eye view of our wars, of the ways in which those wars are represented, of the ways in which the media affect our sense of ourselves and our society in general.

Indeed, it's our new ability to see the world as though from above — Harry was an aerial photographer before he was a photo-journalist; the novel opens with the Apollo astronauts' picture of our globe — which is the book's central concern. When we know so much, asks the author, how can we be sure of anything: from the "truthfulness" of a photograph to the meaning, if any, of heroism? At one point Sophie rehearses an autobiography to tell her sons: "Once upon a time, in the reign of Good Queen Anne . . . Can you picture it? The world is safe and small — it only stretches to the next hill . . ." Both she and her author know this is bunkum, the kind of thing that her husband sells in his brochures; Swift is much too intelligent seriously to think that life was once essentially pleasanter, simpler. What he *does* mourn is what he perceives as our dislocation from history, our abrupt removal from a chain going back through our fathers and their fathers before them.

It's a point of view that makes me uneasy, implying, as it does, that the 20th century's lack of a unifying system of thought, a commonly accepted purpose, a shared understanding of reality, is something that has somehow *happened* to us:

that God, progress, whatever it was that (some) people used to agree on aren't constructs that they themselves invented to cope with a chaos like ours. In other words, Daddy was less a wounded giant than a person as confused as us; he coped with it differently, that's all.

Out of this World is also over-schematic, more like a game-plan than a game played out, with symbols sticking up like marker flags and a structure of crossword-puzzle symmetry. For all of which, it's refreshing to meet so unashamed a novel of contemporary *ideas* — in this country, a rare and valuable encounter. □

TALKING

Mao's weary children

Simon Long

Chinese Lives: An Oral History of Contemporary China

ZHANG XINXIN and SANG YE ed. W.J.F. JENNER and DELIA DAVIN Macmillan £14.95

CHINESE LIVES is prefaced with a gooey eulogy from Studs Terkel. But it is his work in compiling oral histories of the USA which apparently inspire Zhang Xinxin and Sang Ye to do the same for China and the result is a marvellous collection of 64 life stories — ranging from that of a juvenile runaway popcorn salesman to a distinguished avionics engineer who spent the Cultural Revolution as the head cook at a cadre school because he was such a gourmet.

In fact oral history has a distinguished history in 20th-century China. The classic books of American reportage on the Chinese Revolution — Edgar Snow's *Red Star over China*, Jack Belden's *China Shakes the World* and William Hinton's *Fanshen* — all relied heavily on the first-hand accounts of interviewees. It is a further work by foreigners, Jan Myrdal and Gun Kessle's 1963 *Report From a Chinese Village* that, according to *Chinese Lives*' editors, inspired Studs Terkel.

What of course distinguishes *Chinese Lives* from this tradition is that its authors are Chinese. Zhang Xinxin had a reputation before this book for her stories, and as a theatre director who staged Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. Sang Ye is a journalist and columnist. In 1984 they teamed up, toured China and wrote up the interviews they carried out as first-person narratives. They appeared first abroad, then, in 1985, some of the interviews were published in China.

Their work depicts China without the overlay of gloss, interpretation and speculation which inevitably make up the bulk of Western writing on the country. Since it opened its doors in the 1970s, China has spawned a vast literature of travelogue and journalism, as foreign correspondents, diplomats and travel writers have recorded their impressions after their months' or years' residence. There is something faintly shocking about reading a book in English about contemporary China which does not start with the usual disclaimer about the authors' capabilities. Foreign writers generally emphasise the size, complexity and diversity of Chinese life, and the difficulties of making real

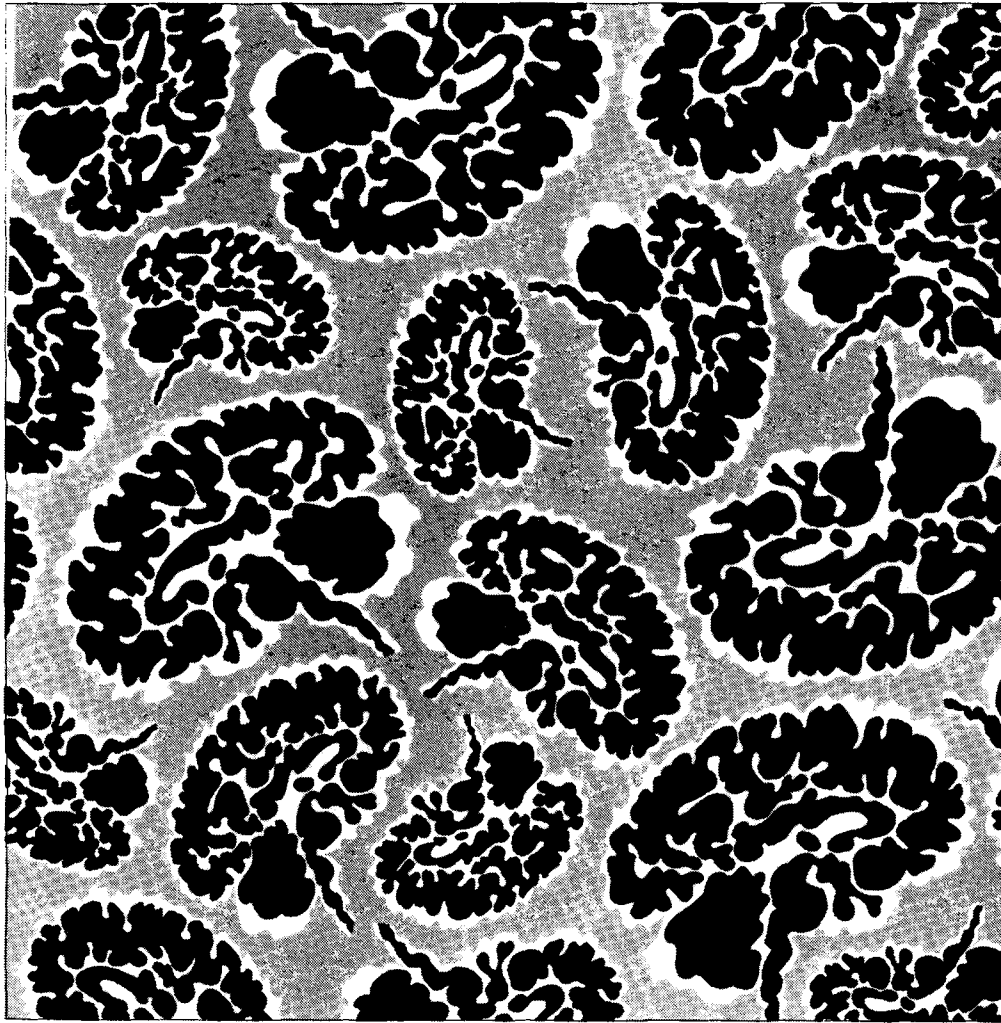
contact with Chinese people.

Perhaps even more shocking is the picture of China that emerges from *Chinese Lives*. One interviewee gets straight to the point: "How much folding money you make out of interviewing us?" The speaker, a newlywed on the first day of her honeymoon, proceeds to display a snobbism accompanied by the most refined class sensibilities. Few other subjects match her, but the theme of brazen materialism runs through much of the book. There is a 68-year-old peasant lady in the remote Taihang mountains who moans that radios cost a hundred kilos of persimmons and a mother of nine who valued her son at 1300 yuan: the size of the fine she had to pay for exceeding the government's breeding quota. ("I paid cash on the nail. If I hadn't they'd have taken the furniture.") The symbols of material advance — sewing machines, fridges, electric fans and bicycles — crop up in the interviews with obsessive regularity, in contrast to references to the political framework.

So much foreign writing on China is an effort to fit the physical reality to the political rhetoric that it is refreshing to encounter a book which does not even try, beyond a useful chronology of recent Chinese history for reference. Even so, the small role of national politics in contemporary life as many of the subjects describe it is surprising. It is hard to imagine that this is simply because the authors ask: "How much do you earn?", where a foreign journalist might have asked: "What do you make of the reform programme instituted by the third plenum of the 11th Party Congress?" Rather, there is a weariness stemming from the other of the national obsessions revealed: the Cultural Revolution, the ten years of turmoil and of enforced political participation up to Mao Zedong's death in 1976. Just as, during the Cultural Revolution, everything written about China seemed to feature horror stories of life before liberation in 1949, so now it seems that everyone old enough has a tale of woe to tell of the Cultural Revolution. Even a former Red Guard describes her experiences more as a nightmare than exhilaration. A depressed political instructor questions whether, in a secret ballot, even ten per cent of the population would say they really believed in Marxism-Leninism.

Chinese Lives is by turns depressing and inspiring. Depressing because it carries few happy life stories: it is largely peopled by grumblers and whingers striving to get by in a society marked by poverty, corruption, nepotism and cruelty. Inspiring because many of them relate in the most matter-of-fact way how they have survived lives of quite dreadful suffering. Perhaps the most extraordinary feature is that so many were prepared to chat with such apparant candour to two strangers. Only a year ago, China seemed on the brink of another purge of those taking the Chinese version of *glasnost* too far. Even now, the contributors to this book, many of whom would be easy to trace, might feel a little nervous to know that some of the comments were to be published on the other side of the world. It is a time again of comparative intellectual freedom but, as a 22-year old stoker in a steel mill, described as "M Average", puts it in *Chinese Lives*: "Life's like that. You never know which cloud's going to piss on you." □

Simon Long works for the BBC Far Eastern Service.



Head's heads: "Living Dead II" (1987)

No risk policy

Have the fears of the Aids generation infected London's galleries? A new exhibition of Tim Head's paintings indicates, argues JAMES HALL, that they may be having a profound and deadly effect

TIM HEAD EMERGED during the Pop Art movement of the 1960s, having studied under Richard Hamilton. Since then his work has explored the vices of consumer society and technology through a wide variety of photo-works and installations. In 1985, however, after presenting the installation "The Tyranny of Reason" at the ICA, he took up painting for the first time since leaving college — a manoeuvre that brought him instant establishment acclaim, a first prize of £11,000 in the John Moores Exhibition and the purchase by the Tate of a work, "Deep Freeze", included in his current show.

Does this necessarily mean that Head has finally bowed to the lure of the bankable art object? Or is there still a satirical sting in his tail? Certainly, so

far as the content of his work is concerned, the move to painting hardly seems to have compromised his assault on consumer society. Seven of the eight paintings in his current show at the Anthony Reynolds Gallery (37 Cowper St, London EC2) consist of flat, repeated patterns based on images of frozen meat (steak, chops), cross-sections of brains and other "organic" forms. What interests Head is the parallel between the way that food is packaged and processed until its original form is lost, and the metamorphoses and perversions involved in genetic engineering. "Replicator" consists of a pink and blue/black pattern — based on the shape of a breakfast cereal, sperm, brains, and chromosomes — placed over a white background: a melting pot of raw materials into which a modern-day Mengele would love to get stuck.

Where form is concerned, however, things are more complicated. The bright, brash colours with which Head's shapes are painted imply a deliberate aestheticising of the initial "Scientific" observation — another parallel is being drawn: between the artist who manipulates and glamourises nature for the sake of "beauty" and the geneticist who

manipulates genes for the "greater good" of mankind. Recently there has been a lot of media coverage of a drug that greatly increases the yield of milk from cows by tampering with their genes. The debate over its viability has involved many of the Ecologists' arguments about not interfering with "nature". Such arguments had, and still have, important implications for art, since a rejection of the ideal of continual technological innovation also constitutes a threat to the primacy of artistic imagination and originality. It was therefore no accident that the rise of the Ecology movement coincided closely with the development of postmodernism, both of which, at their worst extremes, demand a return to traditional, "safe" formats. Head implies just such a correlation between artistry and genetics — but, unfortunately, so as not to run the risk of playing excessive "artistic genetics", has himself taken refuge in traditional means and methods, the artistic equivalents of the horse and cart.

His use of flat, repeated patterns based on organic forms puts him in the tradition of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement. Head's paintings (as the catalogue introduction points out) could easily be wallpaper or fabric designs. Morris, of course, had his own idea of social engineering: he thought that if everyone's home could be filled with the "natural" forms that went into his designs, rather than the crude, artificial ones that were the order of the day, humanity would be improved. Morris failed largely because he rejected the modern technology that would enable mass-production and so ended up, as he put it, "serving the swinish luxury of the rich". Head seems to borrow the decorative vocabulary of our most radical and socialist art movement, yet undermines it by exploiting that very quality which was its greatest failing: that of being unreproducible and inaccessible. In fact, Head is really making a case against *all* kinds of production, natural or artificial: his subject matter and medium are anti-technological, while his "imitation" of Morris (both in terms of style and in the "luxury" of the end product), discredits innovation and imagination. Thus art curls up and contemplates its navel . . .

This is very much an art of the Aids era. Two of Head's works called "Living Dead" have a pattern based on the cross-section of a brain, and were inspired by George Romero's film *Day of the Dead* in which one of the "living dead" eats a human brain. Today's "predatory" living dead are, in the popular imagination, Aids sufferers.

More significant, perhaps, is the flat patterning of Head's more recent works, as opposed to the three-dimensionality of his earlier photo-works and installations. The new paintings create a space that is impenetrable, chaste; in the same way that the "Neo-Geo" work on show at the Saatchi Collection, also an art for the Aids era, is dazzlingly clean and untouchable. This interpretation is reinforced by Head's explanation of his move away from installations: due to the speed with which an installation has to be set up, he says, "there is a big element of risk attached. Certain things are not going to turn out as you imagined". Despite liking "the fact that they were temporary" and that "people could . . . experience them at

first hand", "I realised that I had to change my way of working. The major part of the work would have to be the kind of work that you can play around with and manipulate in the privacy of your own studio." Quite. There are not going to be any risky, brief encounters with Jo(an) Public, only a "safe" art pro-created in the privacy of one's own studio. Let's hope that this period of artistic domestication is extremely short lived. □

CINEMA

A real man

Simon Cunliffe

Someone to Watch over Me
Leicester Square Theatre

RIDLEY SCOTT'S new film, its title taken from a George and Ira Gershwin lyric, is a cracking good thriller. And, like other contemporary Hollywood movies, it filters its taut, suspenseful plot through the *zeitgeist* of an Aids-and-Reagan America — making comparison with *Fatal Attraction* initially irresistible.

Mike Keegan (Tom Berenger) is an NY cop from unfashionably suburban Queens: happily married; one child. He is one of the lads, a good ole blue-collar boy. So is his wife Ellie (Lorraine Bracco). Although she is not above worrying to her husband about her sagging bum, she can mouth off with the best of them and proves a dab hand with a revolver in a crisis. In contrast, Claire Gregory (Mimi Rogers), the sole witness to a brutal night-club slaying and whose protection is newly-promoted Keegan's first real assignment, is an aloof, sophisticated journalist. She lives in a luxurious apartment on the city's exclusive Upper East Side. The couple's enforced companionship traverses a path between hostility and passionate intimacy.

While, in this case, the attraction proves less than fatal, it nevertheless mobilises a familiar, morally qualified scenario. The integrity of the family — the natural repository of traditional values — threatened by the single working woman, the interloping seductress, the harbinger of social chaos. Mimi Rogers is, in short, another *femme fatale* for the Aids era. Like most, she is blonde, attractive and available. And, unlike her fore-runners of the 1940s and '50s (Barbara Stanwyck in *Double Indemnity*, for instance), the transgression to which she incites her lover is social rather than criminal: adultery rather than murder. That which is dearest to the hero/victim, and of which she threatens to deprive him, is his family.

As *Fatal Attraction* neared its hysterical climax the cinema lingered on a photograph of the wholesome, happy Gallagher family to emphasise what was at stake. In *Someone to Watch over Me* the cathartic climax concludes with a shot of Keegan embracing his wife and son. His protective, shielding posture as he turns his head to glance goodbye to his on-looking lover clearly positions her once and for all as the threatening outsider.

Adultery in the movies is nothing new. What distinguished it in *Fatal Attraction* was the now infamous vehemence with which it proposed

Glenn Close/Alex Forrest as the evil party — or, as various observers have pointed out, as a personification of the Aids virus itself. There is certainly a hint of this thesis in *Someone to Watch over Me*, but here there is also another theme, resonating throughout the movie: the discrepancy in the backgrounds of the two lovers.

"Fucking A," Keegan whistles through his teeth as he casually inspects Ms Gregory's walk-through wardrobe, the contents of which would fund a sizeable down-payment for the house on which his wife has set her mind. It is as if Keegan has walked out of a Springsteen lyric and into a performance of grand opera. In studied contrast to the cramped domestic clutter of his own home, Gregory's apartment is a spacious maze of mirrors and marble — and, indeed, is accompanied by opera, the aria of *La Wally*, on sound track.

Since *La Wally* featured so effectively in the French movie *Diva* some years back, opera has predictably and tiresomely become the motif of cultural fecundity. Yuppies drive BMWs, carry matt black brief cases, wear wide braces, line the walls of their apartments with expensive art collections and listen to opera on compact disc (with *Rigoletto* no. 1 in this particular hit parade). But the extravagance of Gregory's material and cultural affluence does have a purpose: to amplify the spiritual poverty and moral vulnerability of the self-interested, WASPish, upper-middle-class milieu to which she belongs. Her escort in the initial stages of the movie is clearly a nerdish yuppie; it is he who suggests that perhaps she should make life easier and safer for herself by not testifying to the killing she has seen. Keegan's position is that she should, and that he will, of course, protect her. Thus moral ascendancy is clearly located within the blue-collar, working-class community.

Likewise the relationship between Gregory and Keegan exposes her unfulfilled emotional life: while he may envy her manners, she envies him his family life and his sense of belonging, his class solidarity.

Keegan is a flawed hero, but a hero nonetheless, whose transgression of moral codes protected and nurtured primarily by his own peer group is recuperated in his reunion with his family. In similar fashion, the real hero of Oliver Stone's forthcoming *Wall Street* is steadfast blue-collar union organiser Martin Sheen, who, unlike his screen (and actual) son Charlie Sheen (protégé to Michael Douglas' Boeskan dinosaur, Gordon Gekko) is not seduced by the glamour of the fast buck. The values he recognises reside in honest work, in creating something useful. Sheen junior accedes to this hard learnt lesson as his father accompanies him to the court house where he is due to appear on charges of fraud. Again, the moral thrust in the forthcoming comedy *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* is one in which haughty yuppie Steve Martin, cooped up for days in the company of the rambunctious shower-curtain-ringing salesman, John Candy, learns a little humility, becomes a little more human.

Last year a spate of escapist fantasies (*Something Wild*, *Blind Date*, *Who's That Girl?*) rescued their protagonists from boring, humourless, upwardly-mobile careers. The mood in a new batch of movies is less forgiving. It seems predicated upon a heightened consciousness which isolates yuppies as a class upon which both sexual and fiscal profligacy converge. In view of Aids and

of the quagmire at the end of Ronnie's Reaganomic rainbow, such a mood in the movies might be said to constitute something of a backlash against the era's former champions. And, while many of us may quietly cheer about that, there are the usual ideological "buts" to contend with — not least of which is the continued abuse of the Aids-age *femme fatale*. □

Le rouge et le noir

Charles Fox

Bird Lives

RED RODNEY and PETER KING *Flambard's Wine Bar, Cambridge and on tour*

Celebrating Bird

GARY GIDDINS Hodder £10.95

TIDY-MINDED PEOPLE often equate death with destruction. Yet the handful of believers who scribbled "Bird Lives" on walls in Greenwich Village the weekend after Charlie Parker died in 1955 wrote no more than the solid truth. Most New York papers ignored the event; of those that did all but one got his age wrong; yet scarcely any jazz saxophonist born after 1920 was untouched by Parker's playing. And it went beyond that. Not since Louis Armstrong imprinted himself upon his contemporaries — trumpeters, pianists, clarinet players, instrumentalists of every sort — had a musician so comprehensively reconstructed the patterns and sounds of jazz as Parker did during the last half of his 34 years of life.

Artists who die young, especially those addicted to drugs or booze, run the posthumous risk of being romanticised. Gary Giddins, one of the canniest of the newer generation of jazz critics (he writes regularly for the *Village Voice*), comes up in *Celebrating Bird* with what amounts to an extended essay rather than a detailed biography (no fewer than 32 of the 128 pages are devoted to full- or double-page illustrations, all pertinent and many outstandingly good). But the text makes use of fresh material about Parker's early years, notably conversations with the saxophonist's first wife, Rebecca, whom nobody seems to have bothered to interview before.

Parker grew up in Kansas City, adored by his mother, at first displaying little interest in music but then skipping school because he spent so much of his nights at clubs like the Reno. That was where Count Basie led a nine-piece group that included Lester Young, and where listeners in the gallery above the bandstand could get high on the marijuana fumes that wafted up. Parker suffered humiliation when he started trying to jam with musicians of that calibre. His reaction was to become so obsessive about mastering the alto saxophone that he turned himself into a virtuoso. Where most jazz players concentrate on becoming adept improvisers in the most commonly used keys, Parker set out to master all of them. He stuck to standard harmonies but scandalised orthodox contemporaries by using complicated chord changes and further-out intervals. But as well as being an innovator Parker was a great blues player



Bird flies high in California, 1946

and had, like Louis Armstrong in his early days, the kind of unquenchable curiosity that forced him to play a totally different solo every time. Yet perfection of the art was balanced by the daily need to track down a fix. Parker's heroin habit had begun when he was 17 and contributed to what Giddins describes as "the Rashomon-like complexity" of the musician's life-style.

One photograph in Giddins' book shows Parker sitting alongside Red Rodney, a young Jewish trumpet player who worked in his quarter regularly between 1949 and 1951 and who at that time resembled a kempt version of Dylan Thomas. Forty years on — last Friday, to be exact — at Flambard's Wine Bar, only a few yards from Trinity College, Rodney, now looking more like a benign Mickey Rooney, was co-leading a quintet that took its name from that New York graffito. Rodney's partner, the alto saxophonist Peter King, is something of a veteran of British jazz (he played at the opening night of the very first Ronnie Scott Club, back in 1959). To put it succinctly, King must be one of the most fluent and expressive saxophonists playing anywhere in the world, his roots in Parker's methods but his ideas entirely his own. With eyes tightly shut, projecting intensity inside a series of flourishes, he was, as it happens, at his best on "Star Eyes", a tune Parker liked to play. Another British veteran, Bill Le Sage, was the pianist while the group was completed by Andy Cleynert on bass and Mark Taylor drums.

Red Rodney was just about the first white trumpet player to grasp what the beboppers were up to. He had worked in big bands and was to do so again in the course of a career almost as packed with twists and turns as that of the late Jack Purvis. (The vagaries of Rodney's life have been chronicled by Gary Giddins in an essay, "Adventures

of the Red Arrow", contained in an earlier book, *Riding On A Blue Note*.) Forty-five years after he began playing jazz, Rodney retains all his nimbleness, joined, as so often occurs as the years roll by, to a wider emotional range. Nowadays he alternates between the trumpet and the bulkier-sounding flugelhorn. He used the latter instrument for a series of variations on "Greensleeves", a tune Charlie Parker never got round to. Indeed, although the quintet is billed as **Bird Lives**, the music is concerned with affirmation, never with nostalgia. About half the pieces played, including "The Girl from Ipanema", Joe Henderson's "Ricordame" and Coltrane's "Giant Steps", were written after Parker's death.

But Rodney did put down his horn to sing "School Days", the number he sang when the Charlie Parker Quartet embarked on a ten-day tour of the South: territory where, in the early 1950s, hackles were still likely to be raised by the spectacle of a white trumpeter in a black group. Parker's sang-froid stayed undisturbed. "We'll call him an albino," he said, "Nobody will know the difference." Notices on marquees and outside clubs read: "Charles Yardbird Parker, The King of Bebop, Featuring Albino Red, Blues Singer".

Nobody seems to have said anything. "I think black people were too nice to question it," says Rodney, "and the whites that came to those gigs didn't care."

Meanwhile, in our midst, "Bird Lives" celebrates both the tenacity of the jazz tradition and the spirit of adventure which makes all good musicians go their own way. Readers outside London can catch the quintet at Darlington (12 March), Sheffield (13 March, at lunchtime), Newcastle (15 March), Cheltenham (18 March) and Aldershot (25 March). Two gigs in the Manchester

area — Chorlton (10 March) and Oldham (23 March) — take Rodney back to his big band days, performing with an orchestra led by his trumpet-playing promoter, Ernie Garside. □

PHOTOGRAPHY

Freedom's just another word

Liz Heron

Work Stations: Office Life in London

SUSAN FOX, *Camerawork until March 26*

WORK, THESE DAYS, is the curse of the consuming classes. With a growing abundance of commodities and services in a marketplace from which many are banished by unemployment, work is seen more and more in relation to its purest and most artificial form of manufacture: money. The Big Bang created lots of it and lots more jobs to chase it. So did privatising national utilities. It's the money race — making it, spending it, investing it — that dominates our imagery of work, as our old perceptions of "industry" fade. Most of the people we see doing it in the ads are either the new breed of capitalist buccaneers and born-again businessmen (as narrative anti-heroes) or the smiling public faces of financial institutions, usually female.

The latter are more familiar figures, because besides the prevalence of women in the visual promotion of goods and services, office work has been highly feminised in its representations. Decades of Brook Street ads have supplied a barometer of changes in the office ethos and the female worker's status in it. In the 1970s it was often photographed as a rather glamorous soft-focus setting. Work was where you went to look feminine and fashionable and to meet Mr Right. The employment agencies have variously pictured office routine as challenging, stimulating, satisfying and happily sociable, provided you took up the offer of being taken care of by them — until Brook Street's much-remarked withered tulips campaign put the onus on the worker to live up to the job by being punctual, efficient and impeccably turned out. Well-manicured fingernails assumed a more ruthless iconic significance.

What's different again about the current spate of billboard ads for another agency, incorporating its name into the word Freedom, is the displacement of office pleasures and satisfactions entirely on to life outside it, via spending power. Freedom to tap any keyboard; Freedom to slope off any time; Freedom to improve your speed, run the copy-lines jocularly matched to images of post-feminist action women, respectively playing a polished grand piano, skiing and in leathers with a high-powered bike. The ironies are writ large in this use of the language of autonomous self-defined work, in a period when new technology, with its built-in computer surveillance and systems-designed work patterns, has introduced the Taylorism of the factory production line into the regulation of office processes. These days the

only true freedoms are those of consumption.

That Freedom advertising logo becomes almost sinister in the first of Anna Fox's shots. As early morning commuters bunch towards a Charing Cross platform exit, backs to the camera, it's emblazoned high above them, beaming out of the fluorescent gloom.

Fox is a highly talented young photographer whose earlier project on Basingstoke has clear continuities with this one; both survey social topographies of the '80s where the Thatcherite dream has to all appearances come true. Rather than the nuances of human behaviour, it's precisely appearances that interest her: the organisation of environmental space and colour, and the way people fit into these scenarios. Her large-format colour prints are integral to the whole approach. The heightened artificiality of colour, the staginess of spatial relationships, are crucial components in conveying the surface life of the contemporary office, increasingly designed to be moulded into an anonymous corporate statement and to maximise productivity through logistics or computer management of individual tasks.

Soullessness and alienation are words relevant to how work was represented by the documentarists of the '70s. While their pictures often emphasised the separation of work and identity, or showed workers asserting resistance to that workplace-imposed dehumanisation, here, the office personnel seem to have surrendered all identity to the workplace. They seem cut off from one another, isolated by technology and, paradoxically, by too much open space. As Richard Sennett observed in *The Fall of Public Man*, the over-visibility engineered by open-plan office layout induces a self-protective silence that reduces sociability. The same goes for the enforced intimacies of certain town plans and housing developments that impel a retreat from others.

There are few visual disruptions of these depersonalised office spaces. What there is can hardly compete with the garishness of the colour schemes; even the presiding image of Margaret Thatcher in one shot pales with its anaemic pastels. Someone takes shelter behind a makeshift screen of filing trays, but privacy is otherwise scant.

The pictures don't flatter, nor do they target individuals. Anna Fox's captions, drawn from office manuals and business publications or stray, but telling, remarks from conversations, work to present the world of the business office as a drama scripted with only limited flexibility. Its competitive savagery, its language of battle, its misogyny and its stress are gathered into the harsh tension of these wide-angle shots. There's no implicit revelation of selves beyond the roles of office life. The direct smile of the female marketing manager at the clubby business secretariat looks appropriately professional, like the stance of the catering man poised for desk deliveries. Elsewhere no one engages with the camera, their indifference to it apparently dictated by claims of work too pressing to be interrupted. Even the stand-up haste with which a cup of tea is drunk suggests numbed dissociation.

This blatant disregard of any need to rearrange self-presentation for the camera also rules out any disjunction of identity within the office, and at the same time hints at the social and personal fragmentation that's the price of business prosperity, in which some have a much bigger stake, but all can

feel privileged. It makes cooperation or association in the workplace a logical irrelevance and trade unionism both an anomaly and an anachronism — yet in a setting where the hazards of stress and VDUs have overtaken the office job's reputation for easy-going safety. Just as new town phenomenon is founded on the absence of history (Fox called Basingstoke "Doughnut City"), so the "worker" in the business landscape appears as schizophrenically divorced from the "consumer" he or she is outside it, where Freedom lies. □

TELEVISION

Malign influences

Nigel Fountain

Open Space: The Media and the Loony Left
BBC2, Mon. 14 March, 7.40-8.10pm
Into Nicaragua
C4, Mon. 14 & 21 March, 9-9.45pm

THE FORMER EDITOR of *Today* and the *Sunday Times* "Paper Round" columnist Brian MacArthur found something new to say about Kelvin MacKenzie last Sunday. MacKenzie, in case you hadn't noticed, is editor of Rupert Murdoch's other daily, the *Sun*, and was, said MacA "much maligned".

Now MacA may have had time to assess the *Sun* supremo's sensitivity and seriousness; his concern for the inner-city poor, the widows and orphans of the Argentine Navy, but the rest of us have been denied the opportunity. Some of us indeed regard MacK with suspicion, but then we've never had the chance to hear his side of the story. In common with his sister editor, the *News of the World's* Wendy Henry, MacK is obviously a shy person, doing his good works by stealth and keeping out of the way of intrusive journalists and the academic probes of Goldsmith College's Media Research Group. How unlike the posturers of London's loony left boroughs, who fritter away their ratepayers' money on press offices.

Next Monday's **Open Space** is a production of the MRG, and focuses on the treatment of some London boroughs at the hands of Fleet Street and Wapping tabloids like the *Sun* and the *Daily Star*. It is good timing, with Mrs Thatcher's new programme for traders in the inner cities freshly announced. As students of empire know, before the traders come the missionaries, which is just where the likes of MacK arrive.

Not that the Much Maligned puts in an appearance on *Open Space*; he continues to be reticent, together with most of the journalists concerned with exposing the loony left. So we are left with a few words from *Today's* editor David Montgomery to put a Murdoch view. Presumably Montgomery, former *News of the World* editor, feels his new job on a mid-market paper demands an appearance — ABCs like to see their opinion-formers on the small screen.

Thus do we see the MRG sifting through the files of a campaign that began almost as Mrs Thatcher took office, and has been delivering the goods ever since. The Greater London Council should soon be followed into oblivion by the Inner London

Education Authority; other media-led initiatives include the Education Bill, Clause 29, and poll tax, not to mention the occasional pillorying of the likes of the hapless Mandy Mudd of Haringey.

The *Independent's* Anthony Bevin — another *Sunday Times* veteran — does appear. "Journalists," he told the MRG, "are lazy, cowardly and they do hunt in packs." He was detailing how the same story would bounce from tabloid to tabloid, with occasional embellishments.

Journalists, he continued, feared the midnight call from the office, asking why the *Beast* had highlighted excesses more punchily than their own story. "If they fail to deliver such stories then they disappear. There are many journalists in Fleet Street who disappear," he said, conjuring up visions of Latin American death squads.

Open Space deals with tabloid favourites of the last few years: the loony left's bans on Robin Redbreast or baaing Black Sheep, plus its financing of gays, and black teens on ratepayer-funded holidays in Cuba. The stories were, the MRG concluded, lies. Press officers past and present emerged to tell of the finer tricks of Fleet Street's trade. Late afternoon calls are a good wheeze, since press officers don't have time to check sources before deadlines; so is the "your local nursery has shot Robin Redbreast" gambit. That one gets the municipal mug lumbering through alibis while ignorant that Redbreast is alive and living in Hackney.

The stories — together with the construction of the loony left tag — have worked a treat. They gather velocity as they fly around the world, and played their part in accentuating Labour's north/south divide. There is an illuminating clip of that former *Daily Star* "columnist of the year" Joe Ashton claiming that while "the media might give them the ball, they [the loony left] score the goals." Up to a point, Lord Copper.

After a mildly toe-curling couple of minutes the **Into Nicaragua** two-parter on C4 becomes a wonderful programme. It follows midwife Kate Hughes, her husband, and doctor Richard Wolson as they journey to the Sandinista state to work for that country's health service. Medicine — except where I'm concerned — rarely interests me and the best of causes can become, via the media, a cliché, yet I was moved, and engrossed. The trio, funded by Scottish Medical Aid for Nicaragua, scatter across the country, learn Spanish, start working, and, by part two are learning as much as they give, with Hughes talking about the lessons that Nicaraguan health priorities can provide for the countries of the north. The north, in the shape of the United States' contras, provides other contributions: 3,500 dead civilians, 120 health centres destroyed, 80 health care workers murdered and 300 children dead of epidemics following a contra announcement that those carrying out immunisations in the war zone would be executed.

SHORT CUTS: Film on Two's **Shadow On The Earth** (BBC2, Sun. 13 March, 10-11.15pm) neatly evokes Gargarin-era childhood in Scotland, inspite of a high "So What?" factor. **40 Minutes: Children of the Open Road** (BBC2, Thurs. 17 March, 9.30-10.10pm) is a shocking account of Switzerland's "charitable" destruction of its Gypsy families. □

LETTERS

The merger

D.M. Grundy, Bolton

I write in support of the proposal to merge the *New Statesman* and *New Society*. It is perhaps a sad commentary on the state of dissenting opinion in Thatcher's Britain that two distinctive weeklies are unable to survive independently.

The promised increased pagination and increased promotion and editorial budgets are to be welcomed but in Phillip Whitehead's statement there was no mention of staffing levels. It would be ironic if a merged publication needed to shed labour. As Thatcher would say, "They could always open their own business".

Ivan Geffen, Walsall

The value of the *Statesman*, to people like myself, lies in its commitment to socialism. We can disagree at times about what that word means. My wife and I used to read *New Society*. I do not doubt that it is an admirable paper — but if the *Statesman* has to tone down its socialist commitment, where else shall we look for the kind of material that we now find in it?

I wish you well. These are difficult times for socialists, whether journalists or lawyers. If the *Statesman* can continue on its course incorporating *New Society*, I shall be impressed. The trouble is that few people can ride two horses simultaneously, particularly if they are travelling in different directions.

A.R. Harris, High Wycombe, Bucks.

I have been a regular reader of the *New Statesman* since 1937 (too long!), though latterly for sentimental reasons — I keep hoping it hasn't got as bad as it has. I read *New Society* from its first issue until 1984, when I stopped because my Open University studies then required other reading.

On the assumption that the best of the *New Statesman* and the best of *New Society* — whatever those "bests" may be — will survive into the new magazine, I welcome the proposed merger. I certainly look forward to "an informed and authoritative magazine covering political and social issues", but, surely, not those confined to "Britain today". The new journal must be no less international in its outlook than its two predecessors.

Ian McIntyre, Machynlleth, Powys

I have bought the *New Statesman* each week for the past 20 years or more. In all that time *New Society* has been available (I bought it once, but never again). If I had wanted to read both publications, I was free to do so. Now I am to be forced to read it, if I want to go on reading the *New Statesman*.

After years of mucking about with this magazine the last few issues have improved enormously. Why change its whole character?

Sociology has been in decline and disrepute since the sixties: don't bore the rest of us with its flagship! This could be the final parting of the ways for us.

Gerard Hetherington, London SE24

Could I ask that the new magazine is not called *NS*. I can understand the attractions of fusing the identities of the two magazines in their common initials, but the practice of giving things initials for

titles instead of words is an illiterate one which should be resisted.

The new magazine, and its title, must stand for something. I hope it will have a title of substance. You could invite suggestions from readers — my own offering would be "State and Society" — but it must mean something. Please spare us from the marketing ploys of the men in the pink socks.

Humanist marriage lines

Jane Wynne Willson, Haborne, Birmingham

Francis Wheen kindly welcomed my booklet on non-religious wedding ceremonies (*NS* 19 Feb.) but says in error that I assume "lovers are exclusively heterosexual". This is far from being the case since I stated "Most of what we say will be equally relevant to any two adults who wish to commit themselves to a long-term relationship . . . including partners of the same sex". If we had excluded gay relationships from our comments on commitment, we would rightly have antagonised most of your readers. I hope *your* error hasn't!

Birtism

Christine Chapman, London WC1

John Lloyd (*NS* 4 March) ignores the central charge made against Birt: that Birtism produces its own bias against understanding because viewers don't want to watch programmes that are worthy, dull and pre-scripted, rather than the results of genuine investigation and reporting in the field. The slumping viewing figures for the *Nine O'Clock News* and *Panorama* — to say nothing of the derisory ratings for Birt's proudest creation *Weekend World* — are ample evidence of viewer resistance to the television of tedium.

Lloyd is also less than fair to the *Panorama* programme "Maggie's Militant Tendency", the subject of a notorious libel action. He says the programme failed because it relied on inadequate evidence. He has no means of knowing that, as the BBC's evidence for the programme was never produced in court. As a former *Panorama* editor, Roger Bolton, wrote in the *NS* at the time: "The BBC got the worst of all worlds — it settled too late to prevent the prosecution from making its case in public, too soon to allow the defence to be heard."

Nor did the programme depend, as Lloyd alleges, on "exposing" two Tory MPs; the two MPs were only mentioned after 33 minutes of a 38-minute film. As a direct result of the programme and the Young Conservatives' report which appeared at the same time, Tory Central Office has strengthened its procedures for vetting prospective parliamentary candidates. The Tories hope never again to have the embarrassment of one of their parliamentary candidates being revealed as a former National Front parliamentary candidate, as happened in the case of Thomas Finnegan in the 1983 general election.

Return of the warrior

John Pilger, London SW4

Noam Chomsky's return to regular print in Britain is great news. Reading his piece on the Middle East last week, I was reminded that it was Chomsky's clarity and sheer intellectual courage which gave us the truth about Vietnam.

Sadly, the contrast with many commentators on

the left here is all too obvious. Unlike him, they would not dare to describe themselves as dissidents and risk becoming "unacceptable". Congratulations to the *New Statesman* for publishing him.

Impartial and accountable police service

Brice Dickson, Committee on the Administration of Justice, Belfast.

The contributions on the Stalker affair by Duncan Campbell and Anne Cadwallader (*NS* 12 Feb.) were incisive and revealing. The announcement on 17 February that two further inquiries are to be conducted into the RUC is at least some consolation to those who believed that the police were once again to be left completely above the law. But whether the disciplinary investigations will eventually unearth the dirty tricks brigade remains to be seen. On its past record the Police Authority for Northern Ireland will certainly not prove itself to be as inquisitive or as inquisitorial as it ought to be. Those of us who have monitored its performance over the past few years will be very surprised if it ultimately dismisses senior officers.

We should never forget that it is in the RUC's own interests for those officers who flout the law to be removed. Otherwise the reputation of the RUC will decline still further in the eyes of the community at large, very few Catholics will wish to join the service (at present 90 per cent of officers are Protestant) and people with information about

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criminal activities will be reluctant to come forward. Furthermore, which law-abiding officer will feel safe patrolling the streets when the public's perceptions of the RUC are so understandably negative?

If Sir John Hermon and the Police Authority really had the well-being of the RUC at heart they would pay more attention to what the general public expect of an impartial and accountable police service.

Salad days

Peter Donnelly, Woking, Surrey

The name of the new Social and Liberal Democratic party seems much too long and pompous for the tiny alliance. We should call it the SALAD party.

Pragmatism on the European debate

David Martin, MEP Lothian Edinburgh

What I find most interesting and revealing about Johns Lloyd & Palmer's debate on the EEC (NS 19 Feb.) is their recognisably differing views on the amount of democratic power which should be allowed to the European Parliament. Lloyd prefers "the horse-trading of the Commission and the Strasbourg Parliament" to the "parliamentary dictatorship which first-past-the-post forces upon us" here in the UK. Palmer, on the other hand, believes in "giving real powers to the expensive but virtually toothless European Parliament".

For my part, I am no ideologue, peddling the European ideal (socialism in one continent), nor do I want to dissolve the EC into permanent revolution prior to achieving our aims of deflation and full employment. I see my task as a pragmatist, a practitioner of common sense (not an easy or uncourageous thing to attempt when leading the British Labour Group in Europe) preferring to deal with each problem separately; considering all solutions on their merits and in terms of how they will affect the people who elected me, rather than by applying social theories designed to solve everything under the sun.

I believe that neither European socialism nor world revolution is imminent. Therefore, as democratic socialists, we must move forward on as broad a popular front as is possible. Some of our ends can be best achieved at a local or national level, others in a European or international theatre. I can only hope that my Fabian pamphlet *Bringing Common Sense to the Common Market: a left agenda for Europe* will allow Labour to take a few steps on that gradual but inevitable path that will lead to the establishment of socialism in the UK, Europe and the world.

Richard Balfe, MEP Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark

I have consistently worked to promote co-operation with other European Socialists since my election in 1979 up to my recent re-selection when, incidentally, I was opposed by a candidate on the grounds that I was too pro-European. From signing the Spinelli Resolution in 1980 which eventually led to the Single European Act I have worked to strengthen socialist links in Europe and will continue to do so. I resent John Lloyd's accusations and it is a pity he did not check his facts before writing the article.

Not lousy landlords

Councillor E.F. Derrick, Labour Housing Group, City of Newcastle upon Tyne

The problems of allocating and managing housing are substantial and everyone concerned for public housing is well aware of them. Housing workers and academics welcome informed and constructive criticism from informed journalists and others. All the more pity, therefore, that *New Statesman's* recent excursion into the public housing field should be characterised by a litany of vague generalisations, unwarranted assumptions and purely anecdotal evidence, leading to the glib conclusion that "Labour authorities make lousy landlords" (NS 19 Feb.).

Points systems for allocation were devised in an attempt to balance different needs in the allocation of a scarce resource. No one has pretended that they are perfect or do not get things wrong. At a time of government-induced acute scarcity of the resource in question, points systems can be strained beyond their capacity to operate in a fair manner. But it is quite wrong to assert that "points in themselves are pernicious", as Jolyon Jenkins does. Again, to assert that "the concept of choice is quite absent", or that local decentralisation schemes are "more cosmetic than real" suggests that Mr Jenkins is more concerned with making his political point than with a serious investigation of what is going on.

Urban myths of people who fake homelessness, deliberately worsen their housing circumstances or provoke their own eviction abound. Anyone with any knowledge of public housing knows of such myths, how they arise and spread through housing estates and departments, and how they can in general be treated — as part of the mythology of urban society, not as the basis for an attack on public housing in general or Labour authorities in particular.

Of course there are enormous problems in the administration of public housing: needs far exceed supply, badly designed houses, poorly trained, poorly paid and poorly motivated staff, paternalism, chronic underfunding, vandalism, damp, poverty and so on. Of course some Labour authorities have been poor landlords, along with those controlled by Conservative, Liberal or Independent councils. And of course the professionals involved — architects, engineers, housing managers and civil servants, not to mention governments — must carry the blame for the problems, along with local authorities, rather than tenants. The whole issue of public housing provision is worthy of a more informed debate in the *New Statesman*.

French queenly

C. Bauer Czarnomski, London W4

Congratulations to Roger Woddis on his trenchantly, and depressingly, apposite Thatcherite version of the Sermon on the Mount (NS 19 Feb.). In the same vein, the following could be added to Mrs T.'s "Christian" moral values: Suffer, little children, but come *not* unto me.

When in her regal rather than evangelising mood, Mrs T. has already responded to widespread complaints about the inadequacies of a starved and battered NHS by paraphrasing the advice attributed to Marie-Antoinette: Let them

take out private medical insurance. As yet, however, — historical precedent notwithstanding — no Revolution seems imminent.

Defending the ILEA

Mike Rustin, London NW2

Is there any hope of defending ILEA against abolition? If there is, it depends on creating, quickly, the kind of populist campaign advocated in your editorial on the NHS (NS 6 Feb.).

Time is short before the crucial House of Lords vote, but education reforms often mean problems for governments, as we've recently seen both here and in France. Of all public services, education has the deepest roots in neighbourhoods, the largest cross-section of citizens in touch with it every day. There are signs that morale in London schools has recovered somewhat from the disruptions of the long pay dispute. The London Parents Ballot Campaign shows that parents are prepared to commit great effort to defending ILEA, and democratic choice, at short notice.

Some — Paul Foot last week at Camden Town Hall for example — have declared that teachers' strike action can defeat the Bill. The problem is that a renewal of chaos in the schools will demoralise parents, teachers and pupils more than anything else. What is needed is a display of overwhelming numbers and strength of feeling. Strike action can only be one part of that, not a strategy in itself.

ILEA needs to mobilise positively, to celebrate the strengths of its educational activities, not merely negatively, against Mr Baker. Its supporters should think of organising a Festival of London Education, even in two months, publicly displaying its fine work in music, drama, art, and other fields. It needs invention and imagination to catch public and media attention — ILEA could form the largest massed recorder band that has ever played, for instance, thanks to its commitment to giving every pupil the chance to learn an instrument.

A festival could culminate in a London march and rally which started from the schools. It should combine teachers, parents, and pupils, marching to music from the school bands. Such methods have just a chance of success, whilst no actions by unions or parents acting alone can possibly succeed.

ILEA has 275,000 pupils in 1,000 schools, as well as tens of thousands of students in colleges and adult education institutes. There is, incredibly, no alternative plan for London education when and if ILEA is abolished. Abolition was introduced into the Education Bill at two weeks' notice. Hardly anyone thinks the Inner London boroughs can cope with London's educational problems as well as ILEA has. It should surely be possible for ILEA to win this argument, and for the people of London to win a crucial battle over their democratic rights.

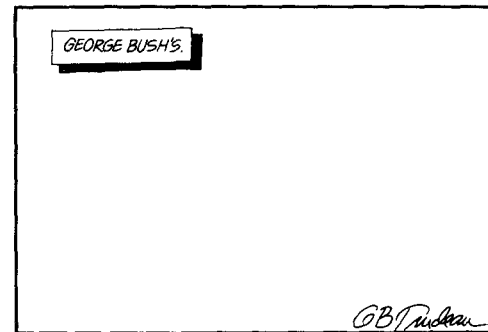
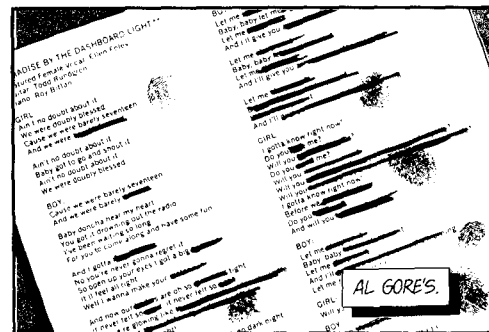
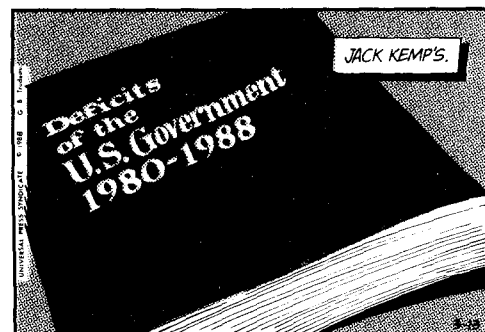
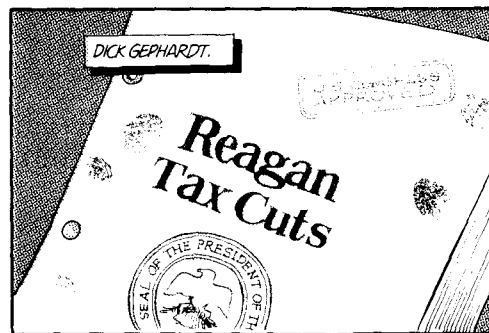
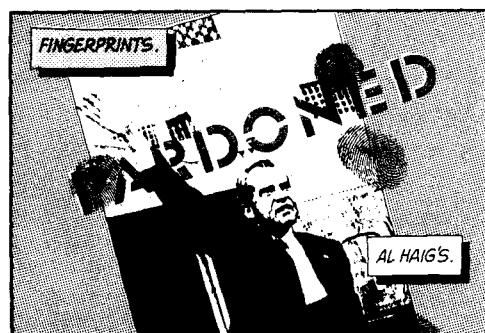
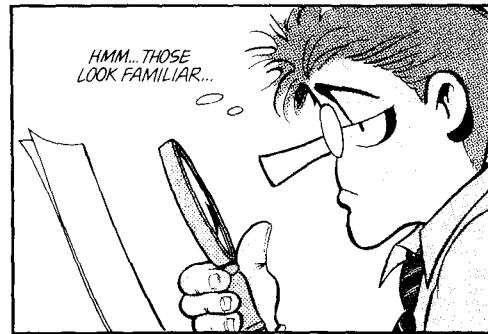
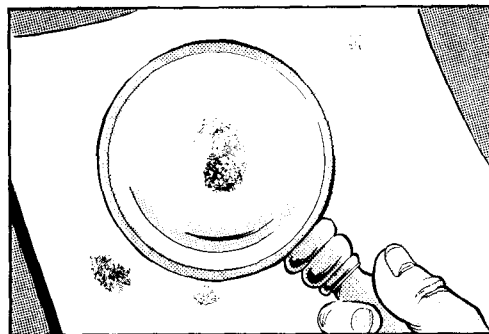
Angry young man

A.E. Alexander, Melksham, Wilts

This phrase was used by Leslie Paul as the title of his book published in 1951. This predates by some five years the reference quoted by Geoff Dyer in his review of Harry Ritchie's *Success Stories* (NS 19 Feb.).

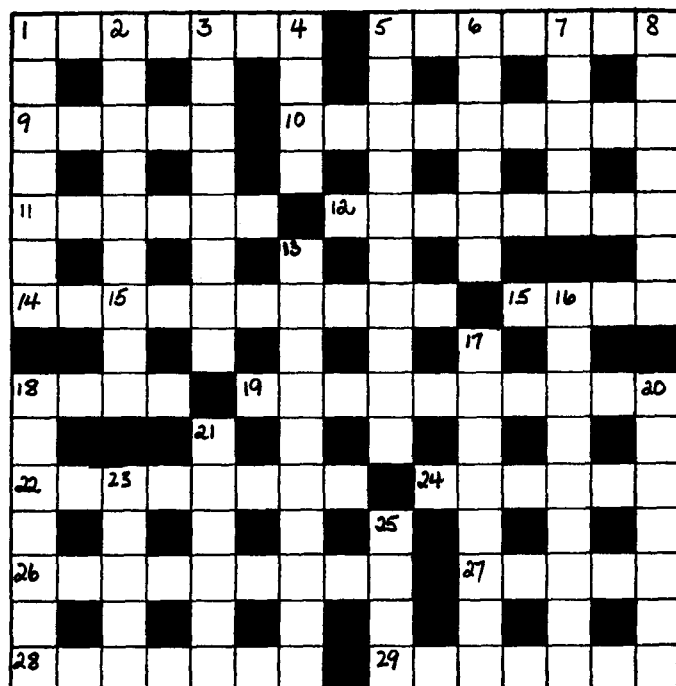
Doonesbury

BY
G. B. TRUDEAU



Weekend Crossword 1588

PRIZES: £5 Book Tokens for the first three correct solutions opened. Entries to Crossword 1588, New Statesman, Foundation House, Perseverance Works, 38 Kingsland Road, London E2 8DQ by first post 29 March.



ACROSS

1. Pretty well the element the swimmers embrace (7)
5. It is sharp to go in for betting with inside information (7)
9. The vehicle was low in spirit (5)
10. Made of stone but it looks more adult in clay (9)
11. Former test batsman who was tender about a duck (6)
12. In sending home letters enclose something to eat (8)
14. James has to guide a vessel out into the open (10)
15. Agreement to produce a performance on the piano (4)
18. Author who is the first to be sold (4)
19. Bill joins several others in a big bed (10)
22. Flounce and be vulgar behind animal covering (8)
24. The attractions of cleaner writing (6)
26. Of a speaker or an examination about nothing (9)
27. Supple and cheerful if born thus (5)
28. Her gift may be found in the cargo (7)
29. Divides up what is dry in parts (7)

DOWN

1. If there were no time these disasters would become punishments (7)
2. Reckless but a prig at heart (9)
3. River Test makes work (8)
4. Drug for the male member (4)
5. Lines created by an animal among men (10)
6. Food provided when no dole is distributed (6)
7. Occurrence featured in the seven times table (5)

8. Biggest committed by everyone during the examination (7)
13. No city, in a word, is the possessor of sole power (10)
16. There is something grotesque about a sailor caught in a cold place (9)
17. Lost hope when these cavities crumbled (8)
18. Departure taken by a beginner if of noble birth (7)
20. Slices which have an actress in the middle (7)
21. Take time to make oneself feel at home? (6)
23. The student loses the right to become an author (5)
25. A weapon for society (4)

SET SQUARE

Solution to 1586

B	A	C	K	B	I	T	E		N	E	U	T	E	R
E	O	O		R	V		N	A	K					
R	I	C	K	S	A	P	E	R	T	U	R	E	S	
E	H	W	C		R	H	I	O						
F	A	I	R	E	S	T		O	A	R	S	M	A	N
T	N	L					N	A						
	M	E	A	L	T	I	N	E		L	U	P	I	N
P	A						M	S			E	T		
I	S	L	E	T		P	L	E	A	S	U	R	E	
E							R	E		I	C	K		
D	E	S	S	E	R	T		H	E	A	T	H	E	R
M	T	A	I	O	M	E	U							
O	V	E	R	S	I	G	H	T		E	A	R	N	S
N	A	O	O	E	S	O	T							
T	A	K	I	N	G		A	L	D	E	R	N	E	Y

Prizewinners to 1586

Ken Sparks (Chester)
Frank Henderson (Hucclecote, Glos.)
Ms J. Watridge (London SE4)

Name _____
Address _____

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Post reference number: 03/02

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AGENDA

Deadline: 2pm Mondays

MON 14 MAR

THE PRIVATISATION OF ELECTRICITY: seminar organised by the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science with Martin Ince, Features Editor of *The Engineer* at Grafton Arms, Grafton Way, WC1 (tube: Warren Street) 6.30pm Monday, 14 March. All welcome.

WED 16 MAR

NEIL FLETCHER (ILEA) on Labour's Education Policy. 7.30 pm in Cole Room, 11 Dartmouth Street, SW1. All welcome. Central London Fabian Society.

SAT 19 MAR

CHRISTIAN SOCIALIST MOVEMENT Tawney Memorial Lecture (free) TONY BENN MP "The Moral Basis of the Radical Left and the Future of British Politics". Sat 19 Mar, 11 am, Lambeth Mission, 1-5 Lambeth Rd, London SE1. Enquiries: 01-794 9234 (pm) or 36 Cross Flatts Ave, LEEDS LS11 7BG.

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ATTRACTIVE LADY professional, 57, youthful grandmother, US citizen, origin Sri Lanka, upper class background, junoesque, warm caring, unencumbered, intends retire 1990, can retire December 1989, wishes live UK. Seeking cultured, intellectual gentleman 48-60, permanent relationship. Sincere replies only. 244 Carentan Road, Hopatcong, New Jersey 07843, USA.

ATTRACTIVE, PROFESSIONAL lady, 40, interests: homelife, countryside, walking, travel, classical music, literature, film and theatre, seeks educated, compassionate, energetic, non-smoking man, 30s-40s for permanent relationship. Photo appreciated. Box (10)0118.

ATTRACTIVE PETITE, professional female (30), animal and countryside enthusiast seeks male with a sense of fun and adventure. North West. Box (10)0931.

ATTRACTIVE, SEMI-RETIRED, professional woman, gentle and sensitive; with wide cultural, social and nature interests; extensively travelled; seeks a male friend, sixtyish, emotionally open, life-affirming and kind, for a mutually nurturing relationship. Manchester and environs. Box (10)0943.

ATTRACTIVE SLIM, fair girl, 19 seeks someone caring and reliable, late teens-early thirties. I live in the West Midlands. Box (10)0935.

BORED DUCK (mid 30s), with cosmopolitan tastes, marooned in provincial backwater, seeks congenial drake for adventures. Box (10)0940.

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DEPRESSIVE MALE, 40, seeks depressive female to share miserable times. Don't worry — we won't change. I see optimists everywhere and I'd hate to be like them. Berkshire. Box (10)0932.

DRAWING DOWN THE MOON 'The Mensa of Introduction Agencies' (The Independent). 01-937 8880, or 01-938 2151.

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WOMAN GRADUATE, 40, seeks intelligent man with wit, intellect, ideals, literary tastes, to share discussions, theatre, trips, play music (?). SE London. Box (10)0929.

UNATTACHED, SUCCESSFUL, male academic, 49, wide range of cultural/sporting interests (music, theatre, travel, squash), reformed workaholic, seeks intelligent, articulate, professional/academic woman, for permanent, caring relationship/marriage and belated family if all goes well. London area. Photo appreciated. Box (10)0927.

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FUN

Weekend competition

No 3016 **Set by Russell Lucas**
Okay, you've had it too easy. This time we'd like a palindromic haiku on any subject whatsoever. By Wednesday 23 March.

No 3013 **Set by Russell Lucas**
Initiation ceremonies for the House of Lords, the Women's Institute, the BBC, the MCC, the Convocation of Bishops or St Paul's Girls' School.

Report **By Rosie Hughes**
First, a personal message to Sue May: you didn't quite deserve to win, my dumpling, but it might be a comfort to know that you didn't come last. We've reserved that position for Peter Norman, whose WI initiation rite was among the funniest entries we received, but also the most disgusting. Twelve pounds to each author of the rites below, with an extra big cuddle for Keith Norman.

BBC

Applicants are strapped in glass booths, with electrodes monitoring their brain signals, as they watch Wogan interviewing Cliff Richard, Jimmy Young interviewing Margaret Thatcher, Duke Hussey having breakfast with Norman Tebbit and Harry Secombe singing "Bless this House" simultaneously. Screaming or glass-breaking before completion of the test will disqualify candidates.

Applicants for senior posts will also (*après un apéritif*) be expected to endure *Bob's Full House* for at least ten minutes, but entrants to the lower grades, will only be required to run past a screen while *Jim 'Il Fix It* is showing.

Although it is not necessary actually to meet Sir Robin Day, high-flyers are reminded that basic knowledge, like Sir Robin's hat size and the location of his birthmark, will be assumed.

CONNIE YAPP

The Convocation of Bishops

Grasp lightning conductor firmly in left hand. Raise right hand towards heaven. Shout at top of voice, "St Paul was a poofier! And how come Jesus never married?" Count slowly from one to a hundred.

KEITH NORMAN

Women's Institute

Taste:
Candidate, blind-folded, must correctly identify samples of three different preserves (sweet and sour) presented to her on various substrates which must include Mother's Pride, ginger cake, oatmeal biscuits and Jaffa cakes. NB: Identification of substrates is not obligatory but may compensate for less than 90 per cent in primary task.

Judgment:
Candidate must order, as in competition, six assorted pieces of handicraft — one of which will be the unaided work of the Branch President. Her answer must match closely a secret ballot of members present.

Tact:
The candidate will be deemed to have failed if, in the preceding test, the President's piece is not placed first or second.

HAZEL STANLEY

Urkhwaite WI

Finally, new ladies must prove their allegiance as follows:

- 1) packing at least 53 different items into a matchbox without breakage or creasing.
- 2) making a useful and acceptable gift out of a) an egg-box (empty), b) a moulting feather duster or c) a redundant airfreshener.
- 3) producing 3 tasty supper dishes from kippers, parsnips and/or rhubarb (without using pastry).
- 4) carrying a laden plate (at 150F) of buttered drop-scones plus a 2 gallon tea-urn (full) the length of Urkhwaite village hall after 3 glasses of Mrs Buggins' homemade sherry-type wine (sweet/extra sweet at candidate's choice) and remain upright.
- 5) singing *Jerusalem* while under the influence of (4)

The Committee's decision is final.

D.A. PRINCE

MCC

After genuflecting and eating a handful of earth at the Grace Gate, candidates are led to the long room where they first submit to the Wisden Test. Ten random pages are read aloud and candidates must identify at least seven correctly.

They then engage in a two-hour conversation with the President on a topic of his choosing. A typical topic would be: "How many times has there been a ninth wicket stand of more than 35 on the first Thursday in May at Trent Bridge?" After a short speech from the candidate on the subject on whether there should be women members of the MCC, successful candidates are invested with THE TIE and allowed to buy a round of drinks for the committee.

MAUD GRACECHURCH

Convocation of Bishops

The candidate shall be seated under a bright light with a microphone and shall reply to the Thirty-Nine Questions. Replies should approximate to the Required Responses — disqualification is mandatory after five or more straight answers. As follows:

- Q 1:** Do you believe in God?
RR: I think I do.
Q 2: Do you believe in His only Son?
RR: Well, I wouldn't be here if I didn't.
Q 3: Do you believe He was born of a Virgin?
RR: Virginity is a difficult word.
Q 4: Do you believe he rose from the dead?
RR: In a manner of speaking, yes.
Q 5: Do you believe in miracles?
RR: I've got this far.
and so on to:
Q 39: Are you a Conservative?
RR: Yes.

JOHN STANLEY

BBC

The Candidate shall approach the Chief Bullshitter and repeat without laughing:

- "The BBC gives a balanced picture"
"The BBC does not submit to political censorship"
"The BBC represents all points of view"

The Chief Bullshitter shall then administer to the Candidate the Identification Test, consisting of an expenses chit, a photograph of Terry Wogan, and three unlabelled brands of gin.

The Candidate who passes the Identification Test shall then be required to swallow a live toad.

The Chief Bullshitter shall then remove his trousers and invite the Candidate to perform the Podex Osculation Ritual. At the conclusion of the Podex Osculation Ritual the Candidate shall receive a contract and a picture of Lord Reith. The Candidate's teeth shall be extracted under a local anaesthetic.

BASIL RANSOME-DAVIES

House of Lords

Dear Mr Smyth,

The Prime Minister is grateful for your letter expressing willingness to accept a peerage in the Birthday Honours List. She has asked me to explain that there is one more small requirement that she asks of all new peers who are not used to the Parliamentary process. She would like you to meet her for breakfast next Tuesday morning, when she will explain the Government's policies on local taxation and education. Bills on these policies are shortly to be considered by the Upper House, and the Prime Minister has it in mind to suggest what you might say in support of them.

Yours sincerely,
Arnold Cringe.

BRIAN RUTH



©CHRISTIAN

Chess

THE BEST contest in the first round of the Candidates' was the match between Hjartarson and Korchnoi. The way in which it ended was unsatisfactory: Korchnoi, having fought back from a two-game deficit, messed up a promising position in the play-off. But of course that wasn't Hjartarson's fault. He had certainly played well enough to deserve to break into the elite of the Candidates' quarter-finals. His win in the first game showed that he had done his homework on Korchnoi's favourite defences very thoroughly. Then just look at the clear-sighted combination on a crowded board that comes at move 24.

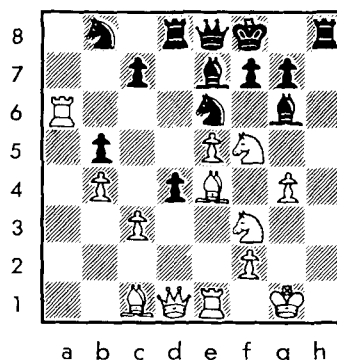
Hjartarson-Korchnoi, Game 1, St John 1988. Open Ruy

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6 5. 0-0 Nxe4 6. d4 b5 7. Bb3 d5 8. dxe5 Be6 9. c3 9. Nbd2 can also transpose into the game via 9... Nc5 10. c3 Be7 11. Bc2 Bg4 etc. Which 9th move White chooses depends on the Black options he wishes to avoid. Apparently Hjartarson is not worried about Korchnoi playing any of the variations introduced by 9... Bc5. Be7 10. Nbd2 Nc5 11. Bc2 Bg4 12. Re1 Qd7 13. Nf1 Rd8 14. Ne3 Bh5 15. b4! A new move. To appreciate its point, consider a couple of games from last

year's Tilburg tournament in which Korchnoi had faced 15. Nf5 0-0 16. Nxe7+ Nxe7 17. b4. He erred against Hübner with 17... Na4? 18. Bxh7+! Kxh7 19. e6 1-0! Korchnoi had missed the point that 19... Bxf3 fails to 20. Qd3+ Be4 21. Qh3+. Against Sokolov in a later round he showed that 17... Ne4! was much better. Hjartarson's innovation prevents the Black Knight from going to e4: 15... Ne4? 16. Nxd5! Ne6 16. Nf5 d4? A move that Black is looking to play, but here it is mistimed. In future we will have to try 16... Bg6 and 16... 0-0. 17. Be4! Effectively prevents both... 0-0 (Bxc6 and Nxe7) and dxc3 (Qxd7+ + Bxc6 and Nxe7). Bg6 18. g4 h5 There is no force in this, whereas the White Rook will inevitably penetrate the a-file. 19. h3 Kf8 20. a4 hxg4 21. hxg4 Qe8 22. axb5 axb5 23. Ra6 Nb8 See diagram. Black's congestion is the cue for a tactical blow. 24. Rxe6! fxe6 25. Nxe7 Bxe4 26. Rxe4 dxc3 27. Bg5 would win against either capture on e7. 27. Ng6+ Kg8 28. Rd4! Rxd4 29. Qxd4 Rh3 The justification of White's 24th lies in 29... Qxg6 30. Qd8+ Kh7 31. Ng5+ and wins. But on the other hand, if he can't play that, Korchnoi might just as well have resigned here. 30. Ng5 Rh6 31. Nf4 Nc6 32. Qxc3 Qd8 33. Nf3 Nxb4 34. Bd2 Qa8 35. Kg2 Nc6 36. g5 b4 37. Qc5 Rh7 38. Nxe6 g6 39. Qd5 Kh8 40. Ned4 Qc8 41. e6

Nxd4 42. Nxd4 c5 43. Bf4! Ra7 44. Nc6 1-0.

Hjartarson-Korchnoi



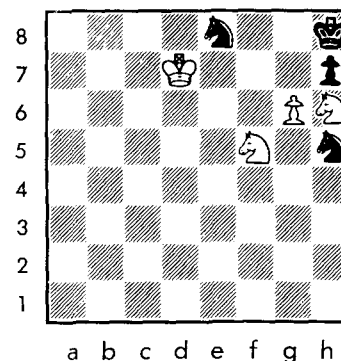
Solutions to last week's positions:
A: [3N2k1/5p2/3b2p1/5r2/8/7P/q5P1/1Q3R1K] Pogats-Hever, Hungary 1979: 1... Rf3! 2. Nb7 2. Kg1 Qa7+ 3. Kh1 Rxf1+ 4. Qxf1 Qd7 5. Qf6 Bc7 Rxb3+ 3. Kg1 Qa7+ Quicker was 3... Bh2+ 4. Kh1 Be5+ and 5... Bd4+ 4. Rf2 Bg3 0-1.

B: [8/4Q2p/5pk1/3p4/3Pq1pP/5pP1/5P1K/2r2B2] Mindadze-Kalugin, USSR

1978: 1. Bd3! Qxd3 2. h5+ Kh6 2... Kxh5 3. Qxh7! 3. Qg7+! Kxg7 4. h6+ 1/2-1/2.

C: [16/5P2/5R2/pp1P3r/n3B2/k7/2K5] Nadareishvili, 1955: 1. Rf2+ Ka1 2. f7 h2 3. Rxh2! Rxh2 4. f8=Q b3! 5. Qxa3+ Ra2 6. d5! Rxa3 7. Bd4+ Ka2 8. Bb2 stalemate.

A charming dance of the Knights, composed by V. Evreinov (1978). White to play and win.



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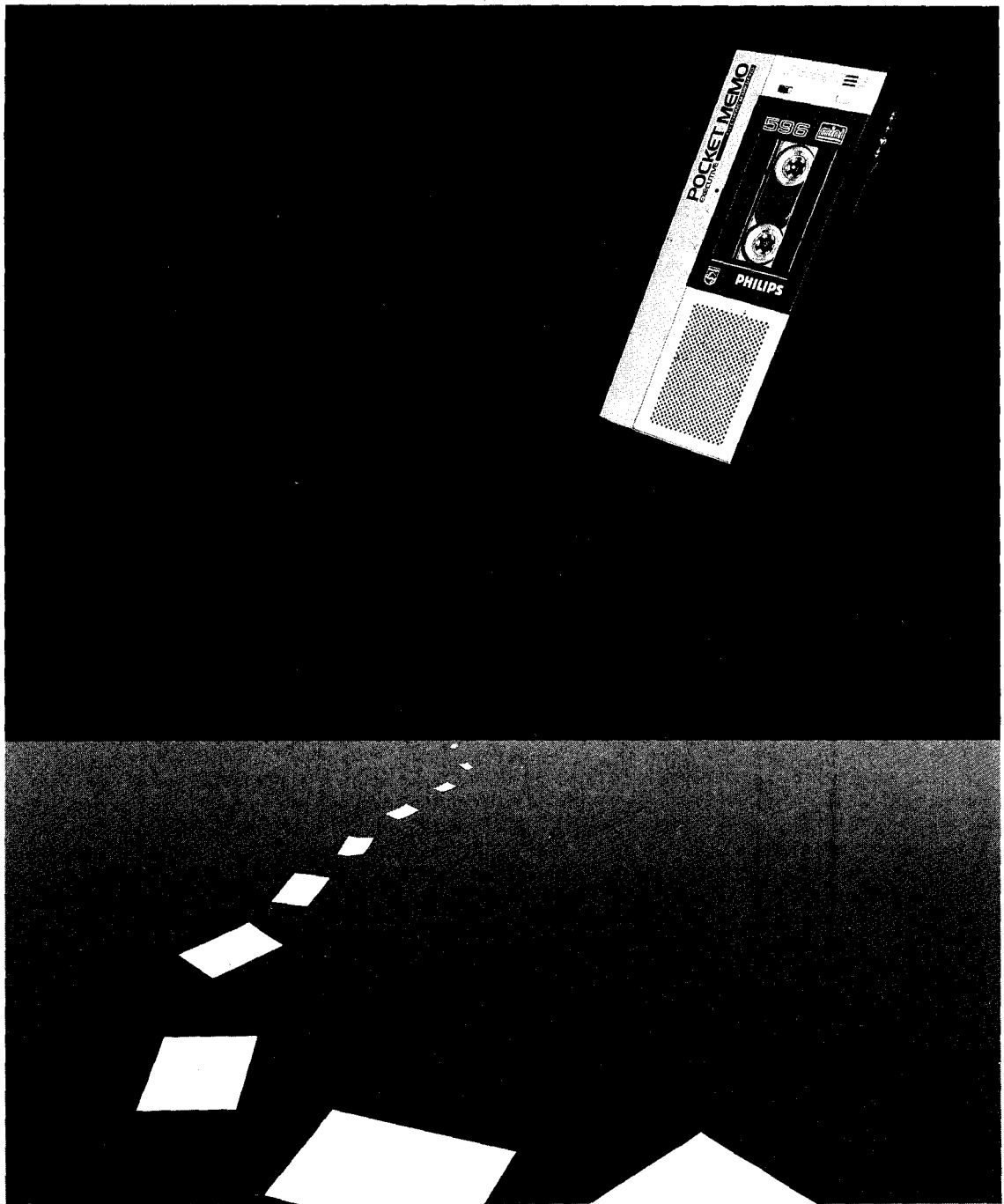
□ A fair amount of EC money may be expected to flow back in the form of aid to the poorer regions of Britain. (This is the paradoxical advantage of the sharpness of the North-South divide, for if the prosperity was more evenly spread no single area would qualify!) — *Spectator* (Jane Banks)

□ Mr Fowler said last night that many of the ideas he had seen in Baltimore could be translated into training programmes in Britain. In particular, he was impressed by a programme which helps the unemployed with personal grooming. — *The Independent* (Michael Rubinstein)

□ Lady Pilkington is now paying rates of £2,184.77 on her home at Windle Hall, St Helens. When poll tax starts in 1990 at current spending levels she will pay instead a personal tax of just £225. Lady Pilkington was not aware the poll tax was going to bring her a saving of almost £2,000 a year compared with her rates bill on Windle Hall. Her reaction to the glad tidings? "Thank God for that. I have enough expense with three gardeners and everything else." — *Liverpool Daily Post* (J. D. Hamilton)

□ Brits like nothing better than a holiday abroad with plenty to worry about. A survey reveals that out of those who go abroad, 96 per cent end up with nightmares. We worry about homes being burgled back home and being mugged by the natives abroad. — *Daily Mirror* (George Moor)

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